



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 01 | JANUARY 2021

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

IN MEMORIAM

Joe Roller (1945–2020)

COMING . . . ZOOM!

Field trips and meet-ups
with an online twist

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Renew-donate-volunteer!

CONSERVATION REVIEW

Looking back, ahead to
DFO conservation role

SPECIAL PROGRAM

Partners in Flight:
Foundation for Bird
Conservation Action

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Pacific Wren

📷 Rob Raker

📍 Bear Creek Lake Park
Jefferson County





FROM THE PRESIDENT

For the holidays, a grab bag of year-end suggestions

Dave Hill

Happy holidays, everyone! As we say goodbye (good riddance?!) to the year 2020, here are a few bullet points for your to-do list en route to 2021.

Renew + donate + volunteer!

Year's end is membership season for Denver Field Ornithologists. It's time to renew if you are already a member or join if you are new to DFO — and while you're at it, why not add a donation in any amount to DFO's special funds? And how about volunteering to help operate our all-volunteer organization? It'll be a DFO trifecta!

Annual membership dues make possible the publishing of our outstanding newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, maintaining our website, producing speaker programs, and initiating our new pandemic-safe Zoom Field Trips. Re-join today and become a better birder while doing your part to protect birds and their habitats. Membership page: <http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx>.

When you renew or sign up, there's a place on the form for additional donations in any amount to Friends of DFO or the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund. Learn more at <https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx>. And don't forget: DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so your donations and your membership are tax deductible for 2020 IF you renew before year's end.

How about donating some time? DFO can always use a hand. There's committee work, writing or taking photos for the newsletter, conservation action, and more. If you're interested, scroll to "CONTACT US" at the bottom of the DFO homepage at www.dfobirds.org, check the "VOLUNTEERING" box, fill in your contact information, tell us what interests you and hit "SEND."

Enjoy the Zoom!

DFO is thrilled to have discovered the Zoom video conferencing platform, which we now use regularly for all committee meetings, board meetings and programs. Zoom allows us to gather in an environment free of Covid-19 risk, and to continue promoting our club and its activities with greater reach and

outreach. Participation in recent programs has ranged well into the hundreds, several times larger than in-person attendance before the pandemic.

We will soon begin using Zoom to provide the social connection for field trips and meet-ups redesigned for this time of social distancing. They will allow us to gather virtually after individual bird outings taken at the same time to share experiences, bird lists and photos. This new structure aims to engage members "together apart" until it is safe to return to the in-person field trips that are DFO's most popular activity. I think Zoom Field Trips will offer a temporary way to feed our passion for birding together and the positive social interaction that goes with it. See the story on page 13 for more details.

Bird close to home!

In this time of birding mostly by myself, I enjoy the discoveries (and re-discoveries) of birding within my 5MR. What's that, you may ask? It stands for "5- Mile Radius" — a circle of birding territory extending out from my home for 5 miles around. It's a national movement to appreciate what's closer to home, whether during a pandemic or not.

If you haven't mapped your own 5MR, try one of these internet links. All you need is to enter your full address, set the radius to "5" and go. For a basic circle, try <https://mapdevelopers.com/draw-circle-tool.php>. For a fancier version go to <https://github.com/joshuahchapman/5mr-tools>. The steps for doing this are well organized at this website.

eBird also provides a handy tool for your 5MR called a "patch," as in your local or favorite "birding patch." You can create an eBird patch to include any and all eBird hotspots and personal locations inside your 5MR. Then you can view your patch species on eBird by month, year or lifetime.

Once again, enjoy your holidays. Until next time: Cheers and chirps!

— Dave



Partners in Flight: Foundation for Bird Conservation Action

Arvind Panjabi

Wednesday, December 16

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

DFO does not host a December evening program. But in this special joint presentation with Denver Audubon, Colorado-based bird conservationist **Arvind Panjabi** shares tools he and others use to promote bird conservation across the Americas.

“Partners in Flight: Foundation for Bird Conservation Action” is co-sponsored by DFO through the support of the DFO Conservation Committee and is part of Denver Audubon’s Conservation Lecture Series.

Panjabi, a Fort Collins-based avian conservation scientist for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, will focus on a core database used for bird conservation planning in the U.S. and Canada. He works closely with Partners in Flight, a network of more than 150 organizations across the Western Hemisphere in land bird conservation science, research, planning, and policy development. He manages the network’s Species Assessment Database.

Panjabi also is expected to discuss Front Range bird species of concern and other conservation issues for the area, what science has learned from the database he manages, and what birders themselves can learn from it.

The Bird Conservancy has maintained and helped to develop the database since its creation in 1992. It contains data on vulnerability for more than 1,600 North American bird species, including their conservation statuses. It also identifies regional bird conservation priorities for dozens of locales from Canada to Panama. Such areas of local interest here include the shortgrass prairie of Colorado and neighboring Plains states,

and the southern Rockies and Colorado Plateau regions. The database Panjabi manages also provides the source data for several conservation priority lists, including the Partners in Flight Watch List and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Birds of Conservation Concern. It has supported the creation of numerous conservation plans and scientific publications, including last year’s highly publicized report in the journal *Science* about the loss of 3 billion birds across North America since 1970.

Before joining the Bird Conservancy staff in 2000, Panjabi worked on bird conservation projects from Alaska to Panama. Initially, he managed the conservancy’s bird monitoring program in the Black Hills of SD and WY. In 2005, he launched the conservancy’s international program to build a permanent bridge for bird conservation across the Americas. He is involved in several cooperative projects in Mexico in Chihuahuan grasslands, western Mexico and the Sierra Madre Oriental. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in wildlife biology from the University of Vermont and Louisiana State University, respectively.

Registration is required for this Zoom webinar. Click this link to sign up: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3GykssM4TYKcVp9ewf0seg

If you are new to Zoom, set yourself up now with a free account online. It’s easy to do and will make joining the webinar as simple as a couple of computer clicks. Find out more at <https://zoom.us/>.

COMING UP . . .



Have You Ever Thought About Birds' Ears?

Garth M. Spellman
Monday, January 25
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

DFO returns to its regular monthly program schedule with this presentation by **Dr. Garth Spellman**, curator of ornithology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. He will discuss his recent research with **John Peacock**, a post-doctoral associate, into the mechanics of a bird's middle ear.

Spellman's research focuses on how recent and ancient environmental changes have affected bird species. He notes that as products of their environment, bird species constantly evolve in response to environmental change. This, he adds, leaves lasting footprints in the species' DNA. Using genetic tools, he examines "bird DNA footprints" to determine how species in modern wildlife communities have responded to past environmental change.

Look for more details about this program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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IN MEMORIAM

Joe Roller (1945-2020): Gifted birder, Colorado birding ambassador, kind and giving to all

Patrick O'Driscoll

About 24 hours before Thanksgiving, Colorado and the world lost **Joe Roller**, a great birder and a greater friend to all he met — and he met so many. A retired Denver physician and a tireless and dedicated husband, father and grandfather, Roller died on Nov. 25 after a battle with recently diagnosed cancer. He was 75 going on 30 — tall, thin as a rail and erect as an egret.

A Missouri native who came to Colorado in the mid-1970s as a young doctor in love with the outdoors, Roller died here, too — the state where, as a boy of 10 on a family vacation, he recorded his first bird and birding list on a paper bag. In Rocky Mountain National Park, young Joe miswrote “Valley-Green Swallow,” but we know what he saw and meant. (Roller still kept and cherished that bag-list.)

Late in his life-long birding career, Roller served in 2015-17 as president and a board member of Denver Field Ornithologists. He also served several years on the DFO Board in the 1990s and led many DFO field trips. He was a 46-year member of both DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists, serving six years on the CFO board (2009-14). He also served seven years on the board of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (2007-14), now Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

News of Roller's passing stirred an unprecedented outpouring of memories and tributes on birding social-media platforms through the long Thanksgiving weekend. (*See related story on page 11 of this issue.*)

On Nov. 24, the day before Joe's death in the post-midnight minutes of Thanksgiving Eve, “he was still cracking jokes with the nurses,” longtime friend and fellow birder **Larry Modesitt** of Arvada said in announcing Joe's passing on Cobirds. Robbed of the ability to speak aloud by the cancerous tumor that

was killing him, Joe was still talkative. He used his expressive repertoire of winks, gestures and eye rolls to make those around him laugh. His wife of almost 44 years, **MaryAnne Cunningham-Roller**, herself a nurse when they met, told Modesitt, “He made me laugh every single day.”

Jokester was just the floppiest of Joe's many hats. In an age of specialization and narrow career bandwidth, he was a proverbial man for every season and audience — of the birds he relentlessly pursued, and of the innumerable human beings he charmed, treated, healed, entertained, mentored and encouraged. Roller was a gifted doctor, tireless caregiver to his invalid wife for decades, admired Scout leader, talented Dixieland trombonist (the Boomtown Stompers), consummate storyteller, skilled networker, patient teacher and mentor, wise judge of people and talent, and one downright accomplished birder.

As a birder, Roller traveled to all seven continents. But his dogged pursuit of species across Colorado made him locally famous. At his death, Joe was tied for first place on the Colorado list of the most bird species seen and reported in the state on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird database. Just 17 days earlier, **Norman Erthal** of Arvada had caught up to Joe's 478 species (out of 507 total seen and recorded in Colorado on eBird). Erthal's record-tying species was a Magnificent Frigatebird, a soaring coastal seabird seldom seen inland, let alone in Colorado. It was not yet on Roller's state list. Competitive to the end, Joe knew this.

“I think it was during his one week of chemotherapy that this frigatebird came through Colorado,” said his son, **Tom Roller**. “He pointed it out to me. I told him, ‘If I could unhook you from all this stuff and drive you to that bird, I would.’ He *wanted* to see that bird.”

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of Littleton. “Joe had radar for anyone who was doing a good job. He was the first to compliment and encourage them, whether they were a volunteer clerk or a top ornithologist.”

In fact, it was Roller’s idea, back in 2000, for CFO to present “Landowner Appreciation” plaques to cooperative property owners tolerant of birders—alerting them to rarities, allowing access to see and report notable finds and such. Dozens of plaques have been presented since then, some by Joe himself.

Roller’s less formal intercessions and approaches were even more numerous. “Joe was a one-man outreach committee from the birding community to the public,” expert birder and author **Nathan Pieplow** of Boulder noted in a Cobirds post.

“Joe was the one that provided the lubricating oil,” Larry Modesitt said. “He really helped soothe things down. How the heck do you replace a guy like that? Obviously, everybody will miss his knowledge. Everybody will miss his humor. But what I will miss most of all is his diplomacy, his wisdom and his caring. That’s why he was so revered.”

Joe Roller’s eBird renown extended to his volunteer service as an eBird Hotspot reviewer, helping to develop, pinpoint and name new and worthy destinations on the birding map. His territory included Colorado and Wyoming — and weirdly, a variety of “international conflict zones” from North Korea and Yemen to the Palestinian territories and the Republic of Georgia.

It’s true, and it began as Joe’s joke. “eBird sent out a list of countries that lacked hotspot reviewers, so I signed up for all the conflict zones — as a lark. Actually I am managing 100% of the eBird hotspots in (North Korea), which is ZERO,” Roller quipped to fellow birder **Doug Ward** via email in 2017. “I tried to sign up for the Vatican, but it was taken already. Castle Gandolfo (the pope’s summer home) is crying out for a hotspot there.”

Known across the Colorado birding community for such mirth and good humor (and sometimes awful puns and jokes), Joe was a steady and reliable voice on CFO’s widely read Cobirds list-serv. He was quick to offer birding knowledge, context, encouragement and, most notably, cool-headed diplomacy. He interceded calmly and fearlessly in disagreements large and small between birders and non-birders — not to mention birders and birders — over access, birding ethics, and other matters of observation and opinion.

“When Joe sensed a conflict between a property owner and birders, he would be the first to call the property owner and charm them, usually reaching a good compromise,” said friend and birder **Tom Wilberding**

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Roller, leading on point, spots a bird during a CFO Convention field trip
Tom Wilberding

After a prairie fire in 2012 swept through the well-known birding oasis at Last Chance, 80 miles east of Denver, Roller was instrumental in organizing a partnership of birders and local residents to restore it as a vital rest stop for birds in migration.

More recently, he had organized a team that kept alive the long-running daily Colorado Rare Bird Alert on Cobirds after longtime compiler **Joyce Takamine** of Boulder retired in 2018. The alert lived on for another year and a half, until a shortage of volunteer compilers and his own declining health led Roller to end the effort last May.

Joe's endless advocacy for people, birds and birding prompted DFO to award him its highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award, in 2013, two years before he became club president. Oddly, he was rarely the recipient of plaques, certificates and other accolades — perhaps because he was busy handing them out, including at annual CFO state conventions during his time on the board.

Wherever birders gathered, a car with a Colorado license plate reading "PEREGRN" meant Joe Roller was in the house (that swift falcon was his favorite bird). On Facebook, his "profile"

photo of an exotically colorful bird brought smiles to savvy birders in the know. It was Joe's namesake, the Lilac-breasted Roller. "Anyone who goes birding in eastern and southern Africa will see (the bird), and inevitably it is at or near the top of the list of favorite birds," Colorado bird authority **Bob Andrews**, now in Yekepa, Liberia in west Africa, wrote on Cobirds. "They are colorful, outgoing, and always a delight to see. Very much like Joe Roller himself."

He was born **Richard Joseph Roller** on March 14, 1945 in Hannibal, MO, the Mississippi River hometown of **Mark Twain**, another humorist of some renown. Early on, he chose to go by his middle name. Joe was the eldest of three siblings (brother **Jim** and sister **Merrilyn**). Their father, **Merrill Roller**, was a revered small-town doctor, the kind who actually made house calls. "My dad was very proud of that," said Joe's son Tom. Joe's mother, **Betty**, was "a very loquacious, fun-loving, upbeat lady . . . I think he got a lot of his enthusiasm from her," Tom added.

Skinny as sticks, the brothers grew up not as star athletes but as funny, quick wits and lovers of the outdoors — rivers, nature "and exploring everything around there," Tom Roller said. To no surprise, both followed their father into medicine. Jim became a dermatologist in Columbia, MO, where Joe had

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earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Missouri. Joe got his medical degree at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland in 1971 and served his residency at Duke University. Additional post-doctoral medical study brought him to the University of Colorado in the mid-'70s. Once here, he stayed, working at St. Anthony's Hospital and eventually building a successful gastroenterology practice, partnership and clinic in west Denver.

A few birders even met him there first, not in the field. Once, Roller performed a colonoscopy on **Rob Raker** of Lakewood. As Joe chatted with Rob's wife while her husband recovered from the anesthesia, she mentioned he was a birder and photographer (*see this month's cover*). "Not 10 seconds after I regained consciousness," Raker recalled, "Joe very excitedly insisted on taking me down to his private office to check out the penguin pictures he had just taken on a trip to Antarctica."

When not at the clinic or the hospital, Joe was often out birding, sometimes still in medical garb. **Lea Ann** and **Bob Brown** of Highlands Ranch first met him chasing a rare warbler in a thicket upstream from Kingfisher Bridge at Chatfield. "We were surprised when Joe popped up from the other side of the thicket, searching for the same bird," Lea Ann wrote in a Cobirds tribute. "He was in his blue hospital scrubs, face mask and all."

"He just loved the mountains, hiking, birdwatching, you name it," Tom Roller said. "His first date with my mom was dinner in the mountains. And then, after dinner, he took her to Lookout Mountain to see it all."

MaryAnne Cunningham-Roller had grown up in The Bronx, NY, one of five siblings in a tight-knit, Irish-Catholic family. She worked as an OB-GYN nurse until hurting her back lifting a patient who had gone into premature labor. After surgery, she pivoted out of the maternity ward and into a job in a drug research project that included travel around the country.

In Denver on a work trip in the mid-late '70s, she visited Roller's office to drop off project paperwork he had neglected to sign. Joe told the receptionist, "No, send her in." Tom Roller retells what happened next: "So, they got to talking about things, and he said, 'Can I take you out to dinner tonight?' She said, 'Well, I don't have anything else to do.' He liked to joke later that she had the expense account."

After their dinner date in the Rockies, they dated long-distance until she could move west. In December 1979, they were married in New York City. Tom Roller said his parents' rehearsal dinner at Central Park's famous Tavern on the Green was "quite the culture clash — tough Irish Catholics from the Bronx meeting a bunch of upscale hillbillies from Missouri."

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Birding in Africa



DFO president Roller at
DFO picnic with Tom Behnfield
Will Burt



Joe Roller (1945-2020)

Back in Colorado, Joe and MaryAnne began life and family together (Dan and Tom were born 20 months apart in 1981-82). When the boys were ages 4 and 2, complications from MaryAnne's previous back injury led to more surgery and a year or more dealing with severe pain. Tom Roller said his mother emerged pain-free and mobile for the rest of the boys' growing up: school, sports, travel, and Boy Scouts. Both followed their dad in achieving Eagle Scout rank, and Joe led the boys' Troop 130 in Golden (the family lived in nearby Applewood) as well as the Denver Area Council of Boy Scouts.

About the time Tom Roller went off to college, MaryAnne's back issues returned, only worse. Yet more surgeries, complications, debilitating pain and confinement followed. "The last 20 years have been a very slow, gradual decline, with ups and downs along the way," son Tom said. Through it all (including MaryAnne's bout with breast cancer in 2013), Joe was her constant caregiver and advocate. After his retirement in 2010, he "dedicated himself full-time to her care," Tom Roller said. "She's still bedridden, but not in terrible pain — but she has ups and downs."

Joe's sad diagnosis this fall and death about six weeks later came after several years of a baffling, speech-slurring condition that doctors thought was nerve damage, not cancer. Despite innumerable consults and approaches, no one could come up with anything beyond a haywire nerve in his tongue or cranium, even when it became harder for him to speak and swallow in August.

He emailed friends that month about his declining health. "I consider myself lucky that it has taken 4 years for things to get to this point," he wrote. "I have enough help for MaryAnne now. She has been very loving and supportive, even though she herself is weaker and in more pain . . . It helps that my sons, their wives and 4 granddaughters all live nearby. Who would have thought it would come to this?!"

In October he learned it was a cancerous tumor at the base of his tongue. From there, more tests, scans and biopsies led to chemotherapy in late October and early November,

but "for palliation, not cure," he wrote to friends. Even delivering that dire news, Roller found room for a grim joke. "This situation," he said, "does not bode well for a growing Life List!"

Tom Roller said that in those final weeks, his father did not complain: "He never said, 'I've had it, this is too much.' The only thing he wanted to know was, 'How's Mom doing? How's Dan? How are your daughters? How is your wife?'"

Joe's friend Tom Wilberding said Roller "had reminded me at times of Mark Twain, who wrote: 'The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up.'"

The Roller Family asserted in Joe's online obituary that "the lessons he taught us will guide and shape us forever: Education is the best investment. Read every day. Respect nature. Even bad jokes are worth sharing. Default to decency. Always carry binoculars. And family is the most profound of life's blessings — nurture it with care."

Joe Roller is survived by his wife, MaryAnne; sons Dan (**Dwyer Gunn**) and Tom (**Sally**); and granddaughters **Evah** and **Clare Gunn-Roller**, and **Katherine** and **Emily Roller**, all of Denver. He is also survived by his sister, **Merrilyn Parham** of Hannibal, MO, his brother and sister-in-law **Jim** and **Carol Roller**, of Columbia, MO, and numerous nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Roller's family planned to live-stream a closed Requiem Mass and funeral for Joe on Friday morning, Dec. 4 from Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Denver. They intend to hold a memorial service later once it is safe to do so.

The family has asked that, instead of sending flowers, mourners consider donations to [Denver Field Ornithologists](#), [Colorado Field Ornithologists](#) and the [Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#).

Remembering Joe Roller

Chuck Hundertmark, DFO past president

I met **Joe Roller** in early August 2006 when he responded to a request for a volunteer with fundraising experience to serve on the board of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (now Bird Conservancy of the Rockies). Board chair **Paul Slingsby**, who had put out the call for candidates, asked me to talk with Dr. Roller to explore his interest and acquaint him with the job we were inviting him to take on.

After a phone conversation, Joe and I agreed to get to know each other on a bird outing along Boulder Creek. I still remember it both for the find of an Eastern Wood-Pewee and for the start of a long friendship.

It was during Joe's service on the RMBO board that I began to appreciate his skills beyond birding. Joe was a consummate builder of human relationships. As so many have mentioned in their tributes on Cobirds, he reached out effortlessly (and often) to people, making them feel comfortable and lubricating the conversation with humor, stories and empathy. Perhaps it was an extension of Dr. Joe's bedside manner.

About that time in every board meeting when things started to drag, we usually found Joe passing around a box of assorted See's Candy lollipops, those creamy square ones. Soon, between insightful comments on important governance matters, we were all sucking away like kindergarteners at story time. (Years later, he would apply the same antidote at Denver Field Ornithologists' board meetings, too.)

It was Colorado Field Ornithologists that most captured birder Joe's love of listing and the pursuit of rarities. CFO's county listing program engaged his inclination for friendly competition. He was drawn particularly to the counties stretching east along the South Platte. Among Joe's many birding accomplishments, he remains atop CFO's list for Washington County (Last Chance, Prewitt Reservoir) with 301 species tallied (out of 344 reported on eBird).

His commitment to CFO was especially evident in his six years' service on the board. He was a strong voice for building the organization's human side. He advocated for term limits for directors, believing a flow of fresh ideas and opportunities for others to serve were good for the board. He also promoted the generous use of awards for people who had served the birding community.

During his years helping us build financial support for Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Joe built relationships easily between new potential supporters and the RMBO's leadership.

As he became more engaged with DFO, Joe brought us the same skill in building relationships. As president (2015-17), he established a permanent Nominating Committee, recognizing the importance of recruiting new people into leadership roles. He drew in many of them personally — a suggestion to a fellow participant on a field trip, a chat before or after DFO's monthly membership meeting, bending an ear at the annual picnic. Joe's efforts are with us today: DFO has had an outstanding board of directors that promises to serve members well into the future.

DFO members probably remember Joe most for the humor he brought to those monthly program meetings. He kicked off every one with an entertaining story (including a bad joke, pun or two) to remind us it was an evening of fun. He believed that, at its roots, the purpose of DFO was bringing birders together.

As board chair of RMBO and later as president of DFO, I found I could turn to Joe when difficult issues came up for discussion. He offered thoughtful questions and insights, usually on the human side of problem.

Every time I talked with Joe, whatever the subject, he would turn the conversation at some point to family. He would share news of sons **Dan** and **Tom** or the arrival of a new grandchild. We would exchange news about our wives. Joe loved to talk about birds, but he loved to talk about the people in our lives, too.

Although I will dearly miss Joe, a bit of him will remain with me and with the many in our birding community who knew and loved him.

Memories of Joe Roller . . . in the eyes and hearts of fellow birders

Editor's note: These are excerpts from the week-long outpouring of tributes to Joe Roller on the CoBirds email list-serv — from Colorado, the nation and the world — in the wake of his death on Nov. 25.

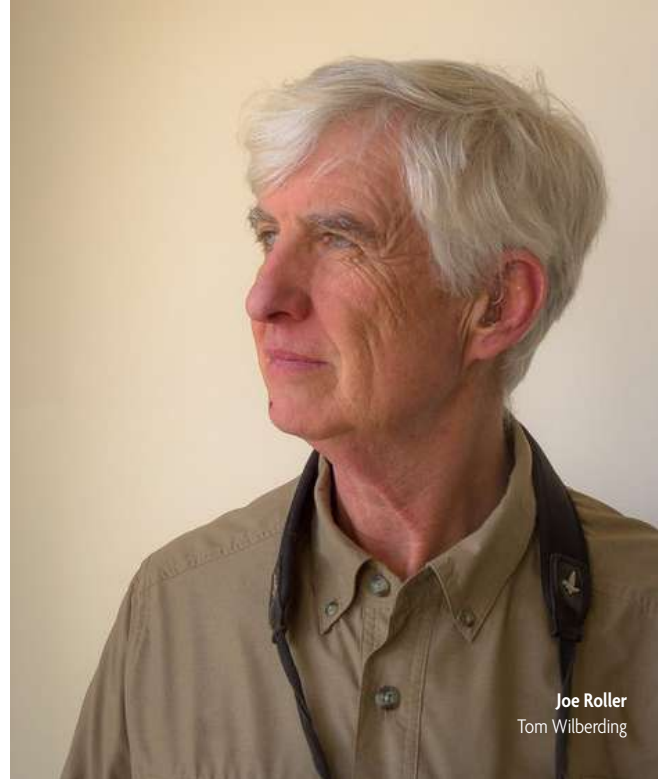
Joe was a one-man outreach committee from the birding community to the public. Remember the fire that burned the migrant trap at Last Chance? Joe was the one who made contact with the landowners and coordinated the [volunteer effort to restore the habitat](#). Whenever there was a question about birder access to private (or public) property, or a conflict brewing between birders and the public, Joe was the one who would [take it upon himself to reach out](#) and try to negotiate a solution. . . One terrific way for us to honor Joe's memory would be to step up and reach out to non-birders in ways that we often don't. His style of outreach is sorely needed, and he's not around anymore to do it for us, so it's up to us now.

Nathan Pieplow, Boulder

Living in Ouray, I haven't birded a lot on the Eastern Slope, but I met Joe at the Ross's Gull at Cherry Creek and ran into him a couple of other times, too. He was, as everyone has said, cheerful, helpful, and knowledgeable. He was the only birder from CoBirds who ever paid any attention to some of my posts on Western Slope Birding Network, and he often weighed in on them, and he was kind about answering my questions. Add my voice to those others who've expressed their admiration for Joe Roller.

Kent Nelson, Ouray

I received many emails from Joe over the years and many times wrote my eBird comments and descriptions addressed to him and his joy of the absurd. Our in-person interactions



Joe Roller
Tom Wilberding

were sparse enough that I was graced with an introduction and enthusiastic handshake every time we met. "Hi Megan! Joe Roller. Nice to see you again." I had been looking forward to so many more.

Megan Miller, Denver

I only knew Joe from the conversations that we had over email. He was always one of my favorite people in this forum because he was so inclusive about birding with everybody. Talked me off the cliff a few times. Truly someone to emulate sharing this passion.

Scott Severs, Longmont

Nathan wrote of Joe reaching out to smooth the wary & engage the non-birders. We were on a DFO field trip on the eastern prairie. There was this fantastic hedgerow, our group across the street. I don't think Joe ever met a stranger. He sauntered across the road to a country older couple and posed the question: "Have you ever seen a birder?" As he schmoozed, they allowed us on their property to bird. Still tickles me to this day.

Diane Roberts, Highlands Ranch

Joe and I only met in person a few times, but emailed many times. He helped me in properly documenting rare bird sightings several times. He encouraged me to join the Denver Field Ornithologists. I can't say enough great things about him, because it would take hours! My thoughts are with his family.

Susan Rosine, Brighton

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Only having met him in person a few times, each was memorable. He had a way of making you feel you had known him your whole life. I will cherish our email conversations relating to all things birding and not . . . What a legend.

Steve Rash, Denver

I didn't have the honor to meet Joe Roller, though I learned a lot from his Cobirds posts. Whenever I saw his name, I was invariably reminded of a colorful bird I saw in Botswana — the Lilac-Breasted Roller — and I imagine him flying over the Chobe River now. Soar high, Joe! I will miss you, too.

Deborahann Smith-Cleveland, North Boulder

In 2006, as a Texas resident, I had the good fortune to snag some field work out of Colorado with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. Worked one project of **Tony Leukering** doing a bird survey of North Table Mountain near Golden. Happened upon a handful of Cassin's and Grasshopper Sparrows singing on territory on this small plateau. Apparently not so common in this county, (so) Tony snagged his friend by the name of Joe Roller and we went out and I got to show them these cool sparrows. I could instantly tell Joe was a legit O.G. birder in these parts. A very sharp mind, very astute human, and a great sense of humor . . . Joe Roller is surely one of the greatest birders Colorado has ever seen, and (is) missed by many.

Derek Hill, Loveland

I was fortunate to meet Joe back in 2015ish, when he took an interest in birds I was reporting around Cheesman Park in

Denver . . . I was glad to meet him for . . . his knowledge of birds, birding, and Colorado birders; his commitment to DFO (and eBird!); his sense of humor; and his openness to non-birders. On that final point: Joe joined a group of local birders and me for a Centennial-area winter bird count a few years ago, but we'd frequently lose him to his conversations with passerby about birds and DFO. He usually had a stash of DFO business cards on him, and he'd give them to anyone who'd ask him what he was looking at.

Jared Del Rosso, Centennial

Two weeks ago I emailed Joe to ask how he was doing. He replied with Churchillian courage, "When marching through hell, keep marching." Never complain, never explain.

Tom Wilberding, Littleton

Instead of mentioning his top state list, Joe liked to tell people that he had the highest ratio of birding stories to birding skill in the state. Like many of his witticisms, that one took a minute to parse. Actually it took me years . . . over time, though, I learned that he was right—he may have had a lot of skill, but he had infinitely more stories . . . Joe Roller was a legend in his own time. He deserves every tribute we can give him. For every story we might tell, he could tell 10.

Chris Rurik, Lakebay, WA

I remember Joe saying, "If you want to really learn something, teach it. And to become an expert, teach the teachers" . . . I learn something so much better when I help others learn it as well. The moral: share your knowledge and it will improve your understanding of the subject and help others as well. Joe will be greatly missed.

Gregg Goodrich, Highlands Ranch

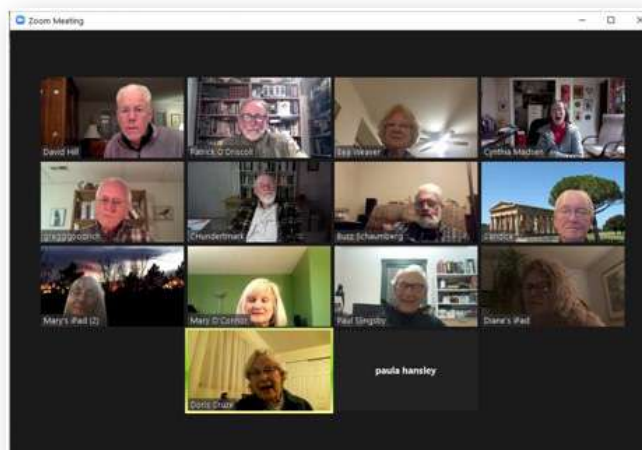
My chest sank when I read the news. I don't know how long we knew each other. Besides the many encounters at meetings, I recall the Ross's Gull we watched together at Cherry Creek SP . . . I was always glad to see him. Not mentioned yet here (I think) is the extensive knowledge he had of such things as history and literature, besides medicine and birds. It was a privilege to have known him.

Karl Stecher, Aurora

I once asked him after he retired if he missed working. He said he didn't miss the responsibility, but he missed his colleagues. You can be sure that they missed him.

David Waltman, Boulder

Coming . . . Zoom! Field trips and meet-ups with an online twist



Patrick O'Driscoll

OK: Who's up for a DFO field trip — or a DFO meet-up?

For nearly nine months, the coronavirus pandemic has prevented Denver Field Ornithologists from gathering in person, whether in the field on bird outings or on monthly program nights. Most individual members (birders are a resourceful bunch) have masked up on their own for solo outings close to home or farther afield. Some of you have even taken socially distanced trips into the field with a close birding friend or two.

But that special social something about DFO group outings — the camaraderie, the give-and-take, the ready help with bird ID — has been missing, and sorely missed. Starting in January, we hope to change that, using a Covid-safe format and approach with the help of the Zoom meeting platform.

In 2021, DFO will begin sponsoring two kinds of virtual get-togethers. We're calling them **Zoom Field Trips** and **Zoom Meet-Ups**.

As the name implies, participants in a Zoom Field Trip will actually travel into the field to bird, but physically apart. They'll go birding on the same day and time — and in some cases at the same location, though, again, not physically together. After returning from this “shared apart” experience, participants will gather online a couple of days later to compare bird checklists via a Zoom chat and talk about what they saw.

Zoom Meet-Ups will skip the field trip part and focus on pre-chosen topics that participants will discuss live on Zoom. Kind of like a virtual book club or coffee klatsch, meet-up leaders will moderate these virtual gatherings on compelling birding topics, issues, and shared experiences.

In both cases, participants will sign up on the DFO “Field Trips” webpage, just like we all did for regular field trips before the pandemic. The number of participants will be a little smaller — probably fewer than 10, though each leader will decide — so there's time enough for everyone in the Zoom conversation.

“DFO is organizing these virtual group activities to help reinforce social bonds among our membership and keep spirits up during the remaining months of in-person restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic,” said **Karen von Saltza**, DFO's field trip director. “These will allow members to interact live and online with other birders after field outings that are solo but ‘shared,’ and in leader-directed discussions about birding topics.”

Von Saltza and the DFO Field Trip Committee are drafting procedures to make it easy for trip leaders to create and schedule field trips and meet-ups. They will also help leaders navigate running a Zoom meeting, compiling eBird checklists from trip participants, and creating (optional) slideshows of participants' birding photos to accompany the Zoom conversation.

Stay tuned to your email and DFO social media for more details soon about when the first trips are available for signup. If you have never used Zoom, set yourself up ahead of time with a free Zoom account so it will be easy to join your post-field trip Zoom gathering or Zoom Meet-Up. Find out more at <https://zoom.us/>.

New feature for a new year: 12 Tips for '21

*Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. This new feature for 2021 aims to tell readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily activities. Look for a new **Tip for '21** each month through the year.*

January

Snip tip: Keep trashed masks from snagging birds

Colleen Nunn

A new threat to birds, driven by thoughtless human behavior, has emerged because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ear-loop strings of discarded disposable face masks can entangle and ensnare birds, potentially preventing them from flying and threatening their survival.

You have probably seen these discarded masks on the ground in local parks or on the street, roadside or sidewalk. A photographer in Great Britain even snapped a shot recently of one poor Peregrine Falcon caught up in a mask carelessly thrown away along the Yorkshire coast. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-53530961>)

Everyone can help eliminate this threat. Before discarding your own disposable masks (or any mask with ear-loop strings), cut the strings first before disposal. If you see a mask on the ground, pick it up (with a gloved hand) and stow it in a trash bag for proper disposal later (after snipping, too).

Remember DFO's Bring-A-Bag-When-You-Bird campaign started last year by acting DFO Conservation chair **Susan Blansett**? It is more important now than ever to carry a trash bag with you to help protect birds from the carelessness of others.

Got a **Tip for '21** idea to share? Contact **Colleen Nunn** via email at cnunn6789@gmail.com

Welcome to new DFO members

Kathleen Bahr – Englewood, Diana Beatty - Colorado Springs, Lauryn Benedict – Greeley, Blake Besser – Lakewood, Maggie Brahm – Denver, Raymond Bridge – Boulder, Vaughn B Cottman and Vaughn Cottman – Denver, Carol Dix – Telluride, Donna Feldman – Denver, Paula Boswell and Donna Herrick – Brighton, Jacqueline M Heyda and Jacqueline Heyda - Monument, Joseph Leahy – Lakewood, Charlie Lee and Linda Lee – Louisville, Philip McNichols – Boulder, Sherry Nickolaus – Brighton, Molly O' Malley – Littleton, Tina Peters – Elizabeth, Karen Rosica – Denver, M. Beatriz Silveira MD – Boulder, and Julie Thorpe - Boulder

Thanks for contributing to Friends of DFO and to the DFO Research, Education and Conservation Grant Fund

Jeannette Auman, Kathleen Bahr, Diana Beatty (2 donations), Lauryn Benedict, Christina Clayton, Kevin Corwin (2), Doris Cruze, Kristine Haglund, Georgia Hart, David Hill, Marjorie Jannotta and Chuck Hundertmark, Thomas "Tim" and Candice Johnson, Roger Koester, Judy Lane, Charlie Lee and Linda Lee (2), Kathanne Lynch (2), Philip McNichols, Claire Montour, Tom Parchman, Bob Righter, Micki and Bob Shade, Danny Roohr and Betsy Shaw, Peter Stoltz (2), Karen Strong, Mary Ann Tavery (2), Jerry and Sharon Tinianow, Elaine Wagner, Bea Weaver, Cheryl Wilcox, Giselle Youngblood, and Mary Zick

A birder of color's call: Watch people like you watch birds . . . and revise *your* range map

Patrick O'Driscoll

The title of DFO's Nov. 23 monthly evening program was a bit of a tongue-twister: "Coloring the Conservation Conversation." (*Say it fast three times!*) But from the mouth of the man who delivered it, the words and phrases fluttered and danced like birds on a wire.

It was no surprise that among guest speaker **J. Drew Lanham's** many titles — Clemson University professor, wildlife ecologist, author, birder — is also "poet." He infused his presentation with lyrical descriptions and keen conversational turns of phrase and cadence about birds and people and the predicaments in which both find themselves these days. At times, his words also had the inspirational tone of a heartfelt sermon from the pulpit — moving, but not preachy.

Speaking via Zoom webinar from his home "thicket" in South Carolina, Lanham led more than 350 online attendees through key moments, pointers and lessons in his life's passion and profession as a "bird adorer." The author of *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* said he likes to tell stories, and "I like to say that everyone has a bird story, even if it's the chicken that you ate last night or the pigeon that pooped on your car."

Lanham's own bird stories ranged from anecdotes of unbridled joy at discoveries as a "bird nerd" in second grade ("tick-tight for years" with a white birding pal) to a recent sour encounter with a racist farmer who slurred and threatened him for pausing to thrill at singing sparrows in the man's hedgerow along a public road.

To view the complete video of Drew Lanham's program, go to DFO's "Programs and Events" archive at:
<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

But first, Lanham confessed that he no longer keeps a life list (or county, state, annual or other such birding lists), nor does he know how many species he has seen. "I do understand the critical nature of citizen science for conservation, and so for 26 years was the compiler for the Clemson Christmas Bird Count," he said. "But for the most part in this 'list-less' state of being, I've moved into a different mode of birding. Rather than *identifying* birds, I decided I'll spend as much time as I can identifying *with* birds."

He noted the importance of human fellowship in this pursuit. "It's those moments with people who feel about birds the way that I feel about birds that really stoke my passion," he said. "When we combine beautiful birds with kind, nature-loving human souls, it's a heavenly convergence, really."

What Lanham calls his "White-crowned Sparrow affair" with the hostile white landowner was the opposite of uplifting. "So I'm watching these birds in this hedgerow, totally absorbed," he said, pursing his lips to whistle their song. "The old farmer . . . approaches me and begins to recount the good old days of cotton farming when niggers picked his cotton — his words, not mine."

Pausing for a beat, Lanham continued: "At this point, the sweet song of the White-crowned Sparrow was soured by this farmer who insisted that life was better when my ancestors picked cotton in his field." When the man threatened that he was armed, "I left and sat on the side of the road for a while and wrote the incident down." He knew then he'd have to abandon this hotspot, where he had cruised the fence lines in his pickup truck many times, "hoping for Loggerhead Shrikes, watching kestrels hover into the wind . . . my sparrow spot."

The encounter "changed my range map," he said. Like a bird, he sought out similar but safer birding habitat than that place had become. "I was initially looking for (more) White-crowned Sparrows but ended up finding a Loggerhead Shrike in this new place" not so far away. "And so, while I left my (sparrows) behind, there was yet another bird to salve my wound."

Birding friends white and Black comforted him that day, too, "to show me that listing me as a friend and a human being was more important than listing a new bird." This prompted Lanham to challenge his audience to change their "social range

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maps,” too: to see everyone else within view and “begin to compile lists of different others that we know (and) begin to expand birding beyond the choir (and) begin to expand this conservation conversation beyond those we’ve always talked to.”

More than once, Lanham recited his life’s mantra: “Same air, same water, same soil, same Earth, same fate.” Rough translation: Like it or not, all of us, humans and birds, people of color and not, share these same five elements of existence, and coexistence. In a way, it’s one for all, all for one.

Asking rhetorically why race has any place in birding discourse, he answered himself: “Well, I told you a story of how (race) has entered into it. You go back a couple of months, and you can ask my friend [Christian Cooper](#), as he was birding in Central Park, why it matters.”

He suggested figuratively dropping our birding tools to get “the wider view . . . Put down the high-powered, narrowly focused binoculars (that) see the same people all the time, and pick up the lower-powered, wider-view binoculars that allow you to see the horizon and all the diversity of people that share this earth with the birds.” Later, he echoed that act: “Take the binoculars down, look in the mirror and demand the inner progress.”

Lanham concluded his 40-minute talk with a list of “10 ways to protest racism, bird by bird,” with pithy pointers ranging from the now-familiar “Take your binoculars down” to see diversity right in front of you, to “Don’t make snap IDs on birds before you’re certain — likewise do not do that with human beings.”

Lanham stayed almost 40 more minutes to field insightful questions from the audience, via DFO program chair **Bill Turner**. When the first questioner asked what local birding clubs like DFO and Audubon can do include more people

of color and diversity, he advised that they look first to their mission. Without doing so, “It’s almost like going out to harvest something without an understanding of what you’re going to harvest,” he said. “Look around your board table and to the organization, the staff, the leadership. Understand where everyone is.” Then, he added, commit inclusion and diversity to the constitution or bylaws and continue to keep them “in your field of view.”

He answered with enthusiasm when a listener asked why he had subtitled his book *Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature* at a time when “Black” holds the contemporary spotlight. “A little bit of it is an homage to my parents,” he began, “who marched in the civil rights movement to move past all the pejoratives, to be Black (and) to be recognized as such.”

But speaking “proudly as a Black man,” Lanham added that “colored” also recognizes “all that I am”: of 80 percent west and central African ancestry and 20 percent “Brit-German-Irish-Iberian-Southeast Asian-Native American.” That mix, he said, stands for “this soil that my ancestors worked, the clay, the loam, all the leaves that had fallen on it, the cool water of the springs from which we drank, the muddy water of the creeks from which we fished, the cotton that my ancestors picked under bondage, the black Angus cattle that they raised as free people — that *all* of that is me.”

During Q-&-A, Lanham also took note of the webinar’s pre-program slideshow mention of **Robin Wall Kimmerer**, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass* and a prominent Indigenous voice about nature. DFO’s co-sponsor for Lanham’s program, the CU Museum of Natural History, is presenting Kimmerer in its own virtual program on Tuesday, Dec. 8, at 4 p.m. MST. Click this link on the museum webpage for more information: https://calendar.colorado.edu/event/robin_wall_kimmerer_a_mellon_sawyer_seminar_deep_horizons_lecture.



Chico Basin scenes, top to bottom:
 Howdy, birdies
 Cliff Swallow on cow's horn
 Ranch yard art
 Banding a Willow Flycatcher
 Photos by Patrick O'Driscoll

CONSERVATION

Birders get State Land Board's attention: We "do" science at Chico Basin, too

Roger Koester and Patrick O'Driscoll

In an outpouring of feedback last month to the Colorado State Land Board, DFO members and other Colorado birders made a persuasive case for continued birding access to Chico Basin Ranch. They asserted that bird watching isn't just a hobby, it's also day-to-day citizen science, in letters and live remote testimony addressing the land board's Nov. 12 meeting.

That distinction is significant as the board prepares to adopt a new leasing plan in January for management of the 87,000-acre cattle ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties. Livestock grazing and irrigated crop production are first priority on the state-owned property; science, research and education are leading secondary uses, and mere "recreation" is well down the list.

The current lease for the ranch's management and operation expires in 2024. Until now, the company that runs Chico Basin Ranch has allowed birders informal, self-guided access (for modest daily fees) to a property considered one of Colorado's finest destinations for birds and bird watching. But if management changes hands or leasing priorities diverge, this open, effective and inexpensive arrangement could disappear.

The lease has been held since 1999 by Box T Partners (also known as Ranchlands), a Colorado Springs livestock outfit with five ranch operations in four states. The lease gives Box T and its on-site managers wide authority over every aspect of the ranch operation, including who can enter the property.

But in land board discussions with staff this fall about priorities for the next lease, access control emerged as a key focus. So did maximizing of revenue. The five-member board directs management of 2.8 million acres of state trust lands (and 4 million acres of subsurface "mineral estate") to generate revenue for Colorado public schools and education.

The land board's staff has pushed hard on two fronts — boosting revenues and retaining a direct say in who has access to Chico Basin — to ensure that any non-agricultural uses are compatible with the board's mission and goals. To accomplish both, they have recommended that the board commissioners consider so-called "layered leasing," in which non-ranching uses (potential generators of additional revenue) could be separate from the main lease for livestock and hay-growing operations. In fact, in materials

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prepared for the November meeting, the staff had even recommended no longer allowing public access to the ranch once the current lease expires.

That position appears to have changed, in part because of letters before and testimony during the meeting from Colorado and DFO birders. Virtually all the public comments the land board received before the Nov. 12 session were from birders and birding groups, including DFO and individual members. Among other points, commenters noted that every birding visit to Chico Basin Ranch conducts scientific field work when species lists are filed to eBird, the vast database maintained by Cornell University and its Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Until now, the land board and its staff had regarded birding largely as a recreational pursuit, of lower priority than scientific research, including the bird-banding station that Bird Conservancy of the Rockies operates on the property. By the end of the Nov. 12 meeting, board members favored continued birding and bird banding, as well as other research activities, as authorized uses. There also appeared universal support for board member **Josie Heath's** suggestion that bird watching be included in the scientific research category.

At present, Ranchlands handles all Chico Basin activities, ranching and non-ranching, under a single lease. Unclear, however, is how birding and other science would be handled if the next lease were split up or if a different ranching company took over in 2024. Would informal, self-guided access continue?

Birding advocates remain guarded. The concern is that layered leasing could still restrict, reduce and make more expensive the visits that birdwatchers — including those participating in scores of popular DFO field trips to the ranch — have appreciated for years.

If that devil exists, it may be in the details of a draft “Request for Proposals” (RFP for short) that board staff is now preparing for the commissioners’ consideration in January. **Greg Ochis**, the land board’s assistant staff director, has acknowledged that potential lease bidders’ response — or a lack of it — to the RFP could force the board and staff back to the drawing board.

There is also concern that, to maximize income, the land board might subdivide Chico Basin Ranch into three ranches with separate leases. In testimony to the board in November, current lessee **Duke Phillips III**, head of the family-owned Ranchlands, emphasized his desire to keep the ranch intact for both ecological and management economies of scale. Chico Basin is one of the country’s largest remaining expanses of native shortgrass and sandsage prairie. Fragmenting this landscape with more fences and ranching infrastructure would degrade habitat and cause declines in populations of birds and other prairie-dependent wildlife.

Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of the National Audubon Society, echoes the argument for an ecologically intact Chico Basin Ranch. Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges** posted about it to the Cobirds list-serv after the meeting. “Discussions on whether Chico will be divided into separate parcels or kept intact will begin in January,” Hodges wrote. “Aiken will once again be asking birders to come out in numbers to comment in favor of keeping the ranch as one parcel, with one manager. We believe this would best protect the ranch’s conservation values as well as limit habitat fragmentation, one of wildlife’s greatest concerns.”

The DFO Conservation Committee continues to monitor closely all Chico Basin developments. “The value of our eBird lists is of great significance,” acting committee chair and DFO vice president **Susan Blansett** told the DFO Board at its quarterly meeting Nov. 22 via Zoom. That data, she added, “has greatly enhanced our understanding of the 345 species” of birds reported on the ranch, believed to be the most for any one place in the state. Blansett said eBird observations also help the land board in its responsibility “to enhance the ecological value of all the lands that they hold.”

As for birding’s rightful place in scientific activities at Chico Basin, DFO board member and past president **Chuck Hundertmark** said doubters need only “look at the name of our organization” — *Denver Field Ornithologists*. “Birding has always moved towards the science behind it,” he added. “Citizen science has a long history in contributing to the understanding of long-term birding trends.”



CONSERVATION REVIEW

Looking back — and ahead — to DFO's role in conserving birds and their habitat

Susan Blansett

Acting chair, DFO Conservation Committee

A little over a year ago, the DFO Board responded to member feedback about our club's mission and role and established the DFO Conservation Committee. In doing so, the board adopted a definition of "conservation" for the Denver Field Ornithologists:

Within our priority geographical area(s), DFO responds to (a) threats to bird species and habitats, and (b) to opportunities to improve or expand basic requirements for bird life with the goal of recovering and/or sustaining key bird species. And, DFO initiates projects or programs that aim to improve habitat and/or reduce threats to bird life.

Although we've long been aware of human-induced climate change and the peril into which past and present generations have plunged every species on planet Earth, the dire headline in September 2019 from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology couldn't help influencing the board's decision:

Nearly 30% of birds in U.S., Canada have vanished since 1970

As the committee completes our first year of work, we're looking at what we've done and ahead to what may be next. As I sat at the keyboard on Thanksgiving Day, thinking about what to write here, two people who have shaped and steered our club in the past decade immediately came to mind: **Chuck Hundertmark** and the late **Joe Roller**.

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Joe's untimely death the day before Thanksgiving rocked all of us who knew him. As I mourn and reflect with gratitude on his effect on me personally, his effect on DFO looms larger. When the board considered creating this committee, Joe reminded us of the difficult DFO decision in 1965 to decline National Audubon's offer of chapter status and remain primarily a birding organization. That decision led DFO members primarily interested in conservation to split off to start the chapter that ultimately became Denver Audubon. Joe supported the Conservation Committee's formation as long as its work did not blur the lines between the two organizations, which could endanger one or both.

Then, at our board meeting the Sunday before Thanksgiving, past president Chuck reminded us how our birding club's very name makes clear that we are, and should be, about science: *Denver Field Ornithologists*. "Ornithology," says Webster's, is "a branch of zoology dealing with birds." The dictionary also says "birder" is "a person who observes or identifies wild birds in their habitats."

My point: Although virtually all DFO members consider ourselves "birders," our role as *ornithologists* (even amateur ones) has been greatly amplified by climate change. And our widespread use of the eBird app — sharing ornithological data straight from the field — amplifies our role even more at places like Chico Basin Ranch (*see article on page 17 in this issue of The Lark Bunting*). As Chuck added, we are doing "citizen science."

We were off to a good start until we learned of Covid-19 in January. By March, it was beginning to turn our lives upside down. Although its impacts on human life were and are grave, we quickly saw an unexpected positive effect on birds and their habitat: less air pollution with the rapid drop in automobile use. We also noticed a positive for humans and birding. As quarantine isolation drew more of us outdoors, our pastime became a pandemic-friendly activity we could still do while socially distant. Those could not, however, outweigh climate change's role in raising wildfire hazards and sea levels, both clear dangers for birds and humans.

With a chain of events both auspicious and challenging, here's a look back at what your Conservation Committee has accomplished in 2020:

- **Birding with 20/20 Vision:** Created this series of conservation-themed articles in each issue of *The Lark Bunting* in the club's 85th anniversary year
- **Conservation project list:** Surveyed five birding organizations elsewhere in the U.S. to identify comparable near- and long-term conservation projects to undertake this year and beyond
- **"Lights Out Denver":** Recruited volunteers and hosted DFO's first-ever Zoom program in June to support this bird-window collision prevention project
- **Lead ammunition:** Supported and promoted a Denver Audubon/Nature's Partners campaign for the use of non-lead ammunition
- **Westerly Wetlands:** Raised bird and habitat preservation awareness in east Denver neighborhoods around this habitat via advocacy and published articles by Conservation Committee member **Colleen Nunn**
- **Birding access:** Joined in advocacy before CO Parks & Wildlife for non-hunter access to State Wildlife Areas
- **Parks & Wildlife roundtable:** Assumed DFO's role in CPW's quarterly roundtable meetings with a broad range of birding and wildlife/open space groups
- **Chico Basin Ranch:** Closely monitored/ commented on continuing Colorado State Land Board deliberations about birding access under future lease on this bird-rich cattle ranch
- **Denver Audubon collaboration:** Engaged Denver Audubon's Conservation Committee in discussion about ways to work together to raise awareness about conservation of birds and habitat
- **Program co-sponsorships:** Agreed to DFO's first co-sponsorship with Denver Audubon for a special bird conservation program via Zoom in December

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- **DFObirds.org page:** Raised the conservation profile on DFO's website with a dedicated Conservation page (<https://dfobirds.org/Projects/Conservation.aspx>) with initial content focus on threats to birds by free-roaming cats, bird-window strikes and habitat loss

The committee did nearly all of this without spending a dime except for website design of the Conservation page (at substantially lower cost thanks to web designer **Ann Johnson**).

Here is what's on the 2021 conservation horizon so far:

- **Chico Basin Ranch:** Continued close monitoring and advocacy with other Colorado bird-related groups over birding access and against splitting the ranch into three separate units
- **SWA birding access:** Continued monitoring and advocacy for non-hunter access to state Wildlife Areas
- **"12 Tips for '21":** Creating new monthly conservation feature in *The Lark Bunting* to succeed "Birding with 20/20 Vision"
- **Westerly Wetlands:** Additional outreach via "pop-up bird observatory" to engage neighborhood users of this area in conservation advocacy
- **Denver Audubon:** Continuing club-to-chapter collaboration

If not for the pandemic's shutdown of any DFO in-person gatherings, I would introduce everyone on our diverse committee (members from age 16 to 70) for public applause. Instead, please thank these members, past and present, whenever and however you encounter them: **Sharon Tinianow, Steve Ryder, Ian Redfield, Colleen Nunn, Roger Koester, Tina Jones, Debbie James, Chuck Hundertmark** and **Dave Hill**.

One parting thought: There's tremendous room for DFO to do more for birds and habitats in the Denver area and across Colorado. This work won't take a lot of money — just birders willing to work in a fun and rewarding way to do meaningful things for the birds that are out mutual passion.

We are all Denver Field Ornithologists. We are young and old and in between, and of all colors and persuasions. It doesn't matter if the binoculars around our necks cost \$50 or \$2,500, or if we've been DFO members for two months or 20 years. We all matter, and we all can do more for our club. Think about what *you* would be willing to do for bird conservation. Then drop an email to **Colleen Nunn**, the committee's volunteer coordinator, at <https://dfobirds.org/SendMessage.aspx?id=2684>.

DFO NEWS

Membership renewal: We need YOU to help fulfill the DFO mission!

Mary Cay Burger

Greetings, DFO'ers: It's membership season. Have you renewed yet?

Your modest annual membership dues (\$25 a year, \$10 for students under age 26) make it possible for Denver Field Ornithologists to publish this newsletter, maintain our website, produce programs with engaging speakers and lead fantastic birding field trips.

Faced in 2020 with keeping DFO activities pandemic-safe against Covid-19, we pivoted from in-person programs to popular, highly attended Zoom webinars. In 2021, we are introducing innovative Zoom Field Trips and Zoom Meet-Ups until we can return to in-person gatherings once it is safe to do so.

And if you are new to DFO, join us this year and become a better birder while doing your part to protect birds and their habitats across Colorado.

Remember, DFO is an all volunteer, 501(c)(3) organization, so your membership and additional donations are tax deductible for 2020 **if you renew before Dec. 31**.

Join or renew today by going to <http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx> where you can pay your dues through PayPal or by check and review your DFO contact information. If you prefer, go to <http://dfobirds.org/LarkBunting/LB.pdf> and print the last page. Complete the form and mail it with your check.

And why not add a donation of any amount to DFO's special funds? Learn more about the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund and Friends of DFO at <https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx>.

Trouble renewing/joining, or other questions about DFO membership? Please contact us at membership@dfobirds.org.

Lame-duck move threatens Colorado habitat for imperiled Greater Sage-Grouse

Patrick O'Driscoll

Colorado's home range for the Greater Sage-Grouse is in the crosshairs again. In a scramble before Inauguration Day next month, the Trump administration has filed plans that would ease restrictions on potentially harmful development in the bird's sagebrush-steppe habitat in Colorado and six other western states. The procedures appear identical to relaxed rules for oil and gas drilling, mining and livestock grazing that a federal judge already rejected last year as likely to harm the species.

The supposedly revised plans were formally published in the *Federal Register* on Nov. 20, exactly two months before President **Donald Trump** and his administration formally leave office. The plans would direct development on 9 million acres of Bureau of Land Management lands originally designated "focal areas" of sagebrush habitat favored by grouse. The timing of this filing could allow the plans to take effect before President-elect **Joe Biden's** inauguration Jan. 20.

In its final weeks, the administration has accelerated efforts to roll back environmental protections for migratory birds, lease the fragile Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for energy development, dispense with environmental review of logging and road building in national forests, and finish efforts to gut the Endangered Species Act. **Brian Rutledge**, a vice president of the National Audubon Society, told The Associated Press: "We're going to see a real scorched-earth effort here at the tail end of the administration."

In Colorado, the lands at issue are two areas on the southern edge of the Greater Sage-Grouse's range — the rural northwest corner of the state, and the North Park high country basin in north-central Colorado. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which oversees federal policy for at-risk species, says both areas

have significant numbers of sage-grouse, and together they are considered a vital connecting zone for grouse populations in Utah and Wyoming. Fragmentation of habitat and loss of sagebrush lands are considered the principal threats to sage-grouse. Both are linked to energy development, conversion of lands to agricultural use, wildfires fueled by cheat grass and other invasive plants and, in some locales, exurban home development.

Although not formally listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, the Greater Sage-Grouse has been in decline for decades. Wildlife biologists consider it a key indicator species for the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem across large swaths of the interior West.

Generations of Coloradans, including birders, have witnessed the species' elaborate mating rituals, performed on remote breeding grounds or leks. Sensitive to outside disturbance, sage-grouse have abandoned some of these gathering places in areas disturbed by development, especially oil and gas drilling.

The state management plans at issue were reviewed by The Associated Press as it prepared a news story about the Nov. 20 filing. The news agency reported that "each plan reviewed . . . appears to have nearly identical wording and does not appear to make any changes to the federal government's sage grouse plan" that U.S. District Judge **B. Lynn Winmill** of Boise had rejected in 2019. (The other states besides Colorado are Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, northeastern California and Oregon.)

A grouse management plan released in 2015 during President Barak Obama's second term restricted or banned oil and gas drilling in 10.7 million acres of sage-grouse habitat. After Trump took office, the administration drastically revised that plan, shrinking the protected habitat by 83 percent to just 1.8 million acres. That was the plan the judge rejected last year.

The Fish & Wildlife Service keeps a [Colorado state page](#) on Greater Sage-Grouse management. It includes a [Colorado fact sheet](#) on the subject as well as a [map of the sage-grouse lands](#) in question.

The same week that the sage-grouse plans were published, the [Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act](#), also known as the CORE Act, got its first hearing in the U.S. Senate before a public lands subcommittee that includes Sen. **Cory Gardner**,

Continued on page 22



SAGE GROUSE *cont from page 22*

R-CO. Gardner, who lost his bid for re-election and will leave Congress soon, did not attend the hearing nor has he endorsed the bill, which was sponsored by two Colorado Democrats, Sen. **Michael Bennet** and Rep. **Joe Neguse**. Gardner has said he would not stand in the way of the bill. But other Republicans and federal lands officials have indicated it is not a priority measure.

Years in the making, The CORE Act would protect more than 300 square miles of federal land in the Thompson Divide region from gas and oil drilling, designate about 115 square miles of new wilderness in the state, and create a first-ever “National Historic Landscape” at the site of Camp Hale, the World War II winter and mountain warfare training ground near Leadville.



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

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Marching into 2021 with
optimism, hope – and Zoom

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BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

Joder Ranch Open Space: Fine
foothills birding where Arabian
horses once roamed

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Buffleheads

📷 Jim Esten

📍 South Platte River
at 88th Avenue





FROM THE PRESIDENT

January . . . February . . . Marching into 2021 with optimism, hope – and Zoom

Dave Hill

Birdie-birdie, everyone!

Can you believe it? Next year really IS here. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the roller-coaster election and everything else, it felt like 2020 took forever, didn't it? Thank you for staying with us through it all. We who manage Denver Field Ornithologists for you, our members, really appreciated your continued support.

If 2020 presented extraordinary challenges for DFO and our birding community, 2021 will ask for more. Your continued interest and involvement will be crucial to sustaining our programs and sparking creative thinking (both virtually and in the field) as we work our way back to something resembling normal.

After the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to cancel two in-person monthly programs last spring, we moved DFO's fourth-Monday-of-the-month evening programs to the Zoom virtual webinar platform, with smashing success. This new year, after 10 months without DFO's beloved group field trips, we are reintroducing them in a re-imagined way, also with the help of Zoom meetings.

With you behind us, we'll do in 2021 what we have done best through the 85-year history of our club — produce outstanding field trips, present exceptional programs, engage in citizen science and conservation activism, award grants for bird-focused research, conservation and education, publish this outstanding newsletter, engage members on social media, and create new opportunities for learning. Give yourself a hand for that handful: This is DFO. This is us!

Yes, we have optimism and hope. In January and February, you can participate in our first "Zoom Field Trips." In these "together apart" outings, you'll share live on Zoom what you see on your own safe-and-solo birding trip with others who do the same at the same time, on the same day. You can register on the DFO website's [Field Trips page](#) in exactly the same way you did before the spreading coronavirus forced us to suspend field trips and other in-person gatherings.

Field trip leader **Gregg Goodrich** has filled our first Zoom Trip on Jan. 9, and he has a second one planned for Feb. 6. In both cases, birders bird safely in the field by themselves, then reconvene a couple of days later on Zoom for a virtual, fun-filled social gathering about the trip. Expect more Zoom Trips to come!

With the first Covid-19 vaccines working their way through the population, it's impossible not to be hopeful. But we won't deny the hard, essential truth that the pandemic is not over yet. That's why more innovative programs (again, via Zoom) are in store as we count down to what we expect to be the day in 2021 when we can reunite in person at monthly meetings and together on the trail of another unforgettable DFO field trip.

Until then, Happy 2021, everyone! Thanks for your partnership and continued trust.

Cheers and chirps!

— **Dave**



Have You Ever Thought About Birds' Ears? Evolution of the Avian Inner Ear

Dr. Garth M. Spellman

January 25, 2021

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

We hear the birds — but do we know how *they* hear *us*? “I must admit that until a couple of years ago, I certainly did not,” says **Garth Spellman**, curator of ornithology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. “I have studied how bird species form, how they hybridize, their genetics and genomics. I have even studied bird song and how it evolves culturally within and among species. I just never thought of the receiver, not the listener — the receiver or (the) mechanical underpinnings of bird hearing.”

Since then, Spellman and post-doctoral associate **John Peacock** have delved deeply into the mechanics of a bird's middle ear. Peacock “transformed how I think about bird ears,” Spellman says — and he will tell us about it in January as DFO returns to its regular monthly program schedule. Fascinating side note: Spellman and Peacock examine birds' inner-ear mechanics literally. They use bird cadavers “to understand the range of sounds different species can hear.”

Spellman's research focuses on how recent and ancient environmental changes have affected bird species. He notes that as products of their environment, bird species constantly evolve in response to environmental change. This, he adds, leaves lasting footprints in their DNA. Using genetic tools, he examines “bird DNA footprints” to determine how species in modern wildlife communities have responded to past environmental change.

“A few years from now we hope to know enough about bird ears to model the sounds avian ancestors could hear and understand how ecology has driven the evolution of the bird ear,” Spellman adds.

Growing up in Fargo, ND, Spellman developed a passion for biodiversity science in his first summer job — pinning beetle specimens as an assistant in a paleontology lab at North Dakota State University. While completing studies for bachelor's (biology, Carleton College), master's (zoology, Alaska-Fairbanks) and doctoral degrees (biology, Nevada-Las Vegas), he held various research and teaching assistantships and managed the DNA lab and genetics collections at UNLV's Barrick Museum of Natural History.

His full-time academic career began in 2006, as a research professor at Black Hills State University. After seven years there, he became a program director in environmental biology at the National Science Foundation. In 2015, Spellman came to Denver to work for both the Museum of Nature & Science and the University of Colorado Denver's Department of Integrative Biology as an affiliate faculty member.

You must register to attend Spellman's presentation via Zoom webinar. The process is easy: Click this link, fill in name and email, and click the blue REGISTER box: https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/WN_g9s2dQUOSm-wET9smsg4Q

You'll receive instructions and a Zoom link for joining the Jan. 25 evening program as well as an email reminder closer to the presentation date.



The Birds and the Weeds: Ecological Response to the Chatfield Reallocation Project

Dr. Erin Bissell
February 22, 2021
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Denver area birders couldn't help but notice the major changes in access and the lakeside terrain around Chatfield State Park in recent years. The years-long project to make more room for future water storage in Chatfield Reservoir radically altered the cottonwood forest landscape around a reservoir that is owned and operated by a federal agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Birders may have anecdotal evidence of how the project changed the park as a birding destination, but none has looked more deeply into the change in vegetation and bird species diversity than **Erin Bissell**, assistant professor of biology at Metropolitan State University of Denver. Bissell's four-season monitoring research on this bird-plant dynamic — performed with the help of a DFO research grant — is the subject of DFO's monthly evening program for February.

Bissell monitored bird and plant diversity at the reservoir both before and after the recent work to increase water storage by removing living and dead trees along the South Platte River riparian corridor. She will discuss the results and share the contributions of her team of undergraduate research students in this long-term ecological research project.

Bissell came to Colorado in 1999 for PhD. studies in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado Boulder. She earned her bachelor's degree in biology from Montana State University, then worked in restoration ecology projects in California for a couple of years before graduate school. Since earning her doctorate, she has taught courses in biology, genetics, evolution, botany, plant taxonomy and field ecology at Metro State, where she has been an assistant professor since 2017. Besides her work at Chatfield, she works with the Denver Botanic Gardens on a riparian vegetation restoration project along Deer Creek. She is also curator of the MSU Denver Herbarium, working to digitize its collection of plant specimens gathered over the past several decades by Metro State's plant taxonomy students. "A major focus of all my research is to provide training opportunities for undergraduate students that will help them find jobs after graduation," Bissell says.

You must register to attend this presentation via Zoom webinar. The process is easy: Click this link, fill in name and email, and click the blue REGISTER box: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Z_FEJIBJR_ivi76WOKkebA

You'll receive instructions and a Zoom link for joining the Feb. 22 evening program as well as an email reminder closer to the presentation date.

UPCOMING PROGRAM



Hummingbirds: Small Wonders

Sheri L. Williamson
March 22, 2021
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

They may be tiny, but hummingbirds know how to live large. Dazzling colors, fearless personalities, voracious appetites, continent-spanning migrations, "singing" feathers, and sometimes scandalous personal lives are just a few of the qualities that have earned these miniature marvels a devoted following far beyond the birding community.

Join internationally known hummingbird researcher **Sheri Williamson** for an evening with these small wonders at DFO's monthly program for March. As adaptable as they are, hummingbirds are vulnerable to many of the same environmental crises as other migratory birds — loss of habitat and food resources, pollution, and the effects of climate change. Good news: Almost anyone in North America can help build a brighter future for hummingbirds with a few simple actions.

Williamson, a lifelong naturalist, birder and conservationist, is co-founder and director/naturalist of the [Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory](#). She recently completed a major revision of *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America* in the Peterson Field Guide Series, first published in 2002, and she'll provide a sneak peek at this revised edition.

Look for more details and how to join this Zoom webinar in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Broad-Tailed Hummingbird female
Jim Esten

EDITOR'S NOTE

To our readers:
We'll be right back . . .

This issue of *The Lark Bunting* combines what used to be separate issues in February and March of each year. We are doing so to allow a short mid-winter "breather" for catching up with more of the news and features we deliver to you (almost) every month.

As you know, *The Lark Bunting* has done the same thing in summer for years — a July-August issue that allows us to take the same kind of off-season breather after the peak of spring migration.

We'll return in early March, refreshed and reloaded to keep you up-to-date on Denver Field Ornithologists news and stories. There'll be lots to tell about our pastime as avian winter visitors begin to depart and our spring arrivals start to show up again.

We aim to bring with us at least one new recurring feature, something we hope will connect you with the DFO faces and names you have encountered on field trips or at other gatherings, as well as with those you may have yet to meet. More about that soon!

And if you have an idea or two for other topics or features you'd like to see here, please let us know! Drop me a line at patodrisk@gmail.com or call me at 303-885-6955.

In the meantime, enjoy the midwinter birds, and please join us here again in March. Thanks for continuing to read as we bring you the best of DFO 10 times a year . . .

Patrick O'Driscoll
Editor, *The Lark Bunting*

Partners in Flight tracks our vulnerable species

Patrick O'Driscoll

Which of the 704 species of birds that regularly breed in the U.S. and Canada need conservation attention most urgently these days? Cerulean Warbler? Greater Sage-Grouse? Common Nighthawk over Northern Bobwhite? Black Swift over Pinyon Jay? Piping Plover over Brown-capped Rosy Finch? Lewis's Woodpecker? Evening Grosbeak?

If you answered, "Every last one of them," you're not alone. But triaging which of the hundreds of species-in-need require protection the most right now is what a Colorado-based system for assessing their vulnerability was built to determine. One of those behind that system, Colorado avian conservation scientist **Arvind Panjabi**, explained how it works in a special joint presentation Dec. 16 by DFO's Conservation Committee and Denver Audubon via Zoom webinar.

Panjabi, who works from Fort Collins for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, has managed the [Avian Conservation Assessment Database](#) for more than 20 years. The conservancy maintains the database for Partners in Flight, a coalition of more than 150 conservation organizations across the Western Hemisphere devoted to every aspect of bird conservation. Their mission, Panjabi said, is "keeping common birds common" by taking care of them before they become imperiled.

To view the complete video of Arvind Panjabi's program, go to DFO's "Past Programs" archive at: <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

To do that, the database, created in 1992, keeps information about each of those 704 species based on six vulnerability factors: population size, distribution in breeding seasons and non-breeding seasons, population trends, and threats to breeding bird populations and non-breeding populations. Two more factors add a regional perspective: population density, and percentage of a species' population present. All go into "conservation assessment scores" that determine each species' vulnerability status or rank.

Panjabi said the information in the database, updated every 1-5 years, comes from a host of sources, most of which will be familiar to birders: the North American Breeding Bird Survey, the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, eBird, state and provincial breeding bird atlases, and more than half a dozen other kinds of surveys, reports and studies.

Familiar, too, are the many applications of the database's findings. They range from the Interior Department's annual State of the Birds report to Congress to the most high-profile news on bird vulnerability in recent decades, the [2019 report in the journal Science](#) that nearly 3 billion birds have disappeared from North America since 1970.

Continued on page 7

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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The database (which added Mexican species in 2002-2008 and Central American species in 2014-2017) cranks out an array of color-coded watchlists, inventories and rolls of common species at various levels of concern to bird conservation scientists: numerically scored rankings of “conservation importance,” “regional concern,” “regional stewardship” and more.

At the continental level, 25 percent of the 704 U.S.-Canada species rate watchlist status. More than one-fifth of the 176 watchlist species are on the “red” list of birds facing multiple threats or “causes for concern.” The remaining 137 are about evenly split between “common birds in steep decline” and species vulnerable because their populations are geographically restricted.

Closer to home, the two bird-species regions that include Colorado have more than 100 bird species of “conservation importance” — 53 in the Shortgrass Prairie region, and 64 in the Southern Rockies-Colorado Plateau region. Of those, 76 are watch-listed for various threats and concerns. Those in decline include some surprises, from Cinnamon Teal, Western and Clark’s Grebes, Common Nighthawk and Broad-tailed Hummingbird to Western Wood-Pewee, Wilson’s Warbler, Horned Lark and even the Common Grackle.

The forces that threaten birds in Colorado the most range from energy development and pesticides (many of which are 1,000 times more toxic than DDT, Panjabi noted) to free-ranging cats, collisions with windows (far more in houses than high-rises or commercial buildings), cropland conversion, exurban development, drought, fire and climate change. Plus, two-thirds to three-quarters of the birds here migrate elsewhere into other threats and dangers.

Panjabi’s presentation was the result of DFO’s first joint presentation with Denver Audubon. The Zoom program drew an online audience of more than 130 people. Panjabi noted as he opened his talk that it was the first time in 20 years that “any local group” had asked him to speak about the database.



Arvind Panjabi




US-Canada Watch List

176 Species (25%) **IUCN – 83 spp.**
12% of avifauna

- 7 waterfowl (15%)
- 23 shorebirds (44%)
- 61 waterbirds (39%)
- 85 landbirds (19%)

39 Red Watch List (22% of WL)
 Multiple causes for concern

137 Yellow Watch List (78% of WL)

- 70 Declining pops, high threats (51% of Yel)
- 67 Range-restricted, small population (49%)

42 Common Birds in Steep Declines







FIELD TRIPS

In and out: “Zoom” outings under way as DFO field trip director plans to retire post-pandemic

Patrick O’Driscoll

The first of DFO’s “Zoom Field Trips,” combining solo outings and online meet-ups, are scheduled in January and February. These pandemic-safe activities are meant to combine real field trip experiences — individually at the same time or place as other participants — with online gatherings later via Zoom webinar to share live their experiences and birds they enjoyed “together apart.”

The first Zoom trip, scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 9, filled its maximum of nine participants plus trip leader **Gregg Goodrich**, a DFO Field Trip Committee member who helped devise this new Covid-safe virtual group activity. They were to bird in any one or all of five eBird hotspot parks and natural areas along a two-mile stretch of the South Platte River between Bowles and Mineral avenues in Arapahoe County. Their meet up via Zoom is the following Monday evening.

Next up, on Saturday Feb. 6, is a similar individual outing at South Platte Park in Arapahoe County and the nearby area below the dam in Chatfield State Park in Douglas County. Like the January outing, participants will bird individually in the field and meet up three nights later to talk about the trip and enjoy photos and stories. Register as you would for a regular DFO field trip on the [Field Trips page of the DFO website](#).

These Zoom fields trips, a temporary substitute after DFO suspended group field trips because of the pandemic, come just as DFO’s longtime volunteer director of field trips has announced plans to retire. **Karen von Saltza**, head of the DFO field trip program since 2012, said in early January that she will leave once the pandemic subsides and regular group field trips are up and running again.

Von Saltza informed the club’s field trip leaders by email the first week of January that she is stepping aside to make way for new blood.

“I have served happily in this volunteer role for more than 8 years,” her letter to trip leaders reads. “However, I believe it is time for new leaders and younger birders to take over and propel this most vital DFO program into the future.”

Von Saltza, who marks 22 years as a DFO member this year, began leading field trips herself in 2012. She used her announcement letter to appeal for interested trip leaders to consider taking over when she steps down, most likely later this year.

“The job requires some managerial skill and the enthusiasm to launch new programs and try out new ideas,” she wrote. “That does not mean many hours a week, but overseeing our field trip program does require vigilance. Fortunately, the trip director has a very active and capable Field Trip Committee, comprised of skilled and seasoned leaders . . . They are a reservoir of historical knowledge, and they have been a constant resource for me — and will continue to be for the next field trip director.”

Von Saltza is credited with leading a major effort, beginning in 2012, to set new standards for DFO trip organization and leadership. As Field Trip Leader Development chair, she led a committee that created the club’s Field Trip Leader Manual and trip leader certification program. After completing that task, she became field trip director and chair of the new Field Trip Committee in 2013.

In 2018, our club recognized her work and dedication by presenting von Saltza the Ptarmigan Award, DFO’s highest honor.

CONSERVATION

12 Tips for '21: Pollinator plates, habitat heroes

*Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. **12 for '21** aims to tell readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily activities. Look for more each month throughout 2021.*

Sharon Tinianow and Colleen Nunn

Our conservation action tips for this double issue of *The Lark Bunting* both focus on actions to confront habitat loss. It's the No. 1 threat to bird populations and includes agriculture, logging, and so many other human actions that destroy diverse natural areas. Habitats are defined primarily by plant communities, so both tips deal with plants, specifically native plants. Birds and plants have evolved together. Understanding the dependencies that exist between them is key to knowing how to create better habitat for birds. What can you do? Read on!



February

Own a car? Sign this petition!

The [People and Pollinators Action Network](http://peopleandpollinators.org/pollinator-plates-petition/) (PPAN) is collecting petition signatures to get state approval for a special pollinator license plate. In pursuit of 3,000 registered vehicle owners to sign on, they will be collecting signatures well into January. Funds from this license plate will help the network purchase and seed more landscapes with the native plants that

native pollinators need to thrive. You can find the petition here: <http://peopleandpollinators.org/pollinator-plates-petition/>. Please consider signing the petition and pass along the link to your network of family and friends.

What do native plants and pollinators have to do with birds? There are three basic connections. First, our native hummingbirds ARE pollinators. Planting species hummingbirds love, like penstemon, columbine and scarlet gilia, supports hummingbirds directly. Beyond that, think of the many seed-eating birds. They evolved to thrive on the seeds of native plants. In order to produce seeds, those plants need to be pollinated by insects like bees and butterflies. Finally, most pollinators are insects, and they are food for many birds, especially in nesting season. Chicks need the protein that caterpillars and adult insects provide. Since many insects are very particular about which plant they feed on, natural areas and urban yards with native plants are exactly what insects, especially butterflies, need to lay their eggs. End result? An ecosystem that benefits local bird populations along with the rest of us.

Which leads us to . . .



March

Be a habitat hero in your own backyard

If you have a yard, you can create habitat to support birds, too. In fact, **Doug Tallamy**, author of *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard* (2020), advocates for the importance of backyard habitats. Using bird-friendly backyards to break up the vast sprawl of concrete and monoculture lawns across the urban landscape is critical to bird survival.

Continued on page 10

Now is the perfect time of year to make your plans. One of the best resources is the Audubon Rockies Habitat Hero Resources website (<https://rockies.audubon.org/habitat-hero/resources>). It is filled with information on the benefits of native plants, where to find them, yard design tips, a reading list and how to certify your yard as a Habitat Hero garden.

Another great resource is the Wild Ones Front Range Chapter. Its website (<https://frontrangewildones.org/>) contains information on replacing your lawn with native plants, seed swaps, the value of choosing native plant species and more.

Planning time is critical. If you wait until plants start to show up in your local nursery, you may find that their inventory, heavy with non-native plants, may not sufficiently support birds and the insects on which they depend. Many garden retailers stock spring-blooming plants to encourage your purchase right away. That may leave your garden barren of blooms (and, therefore, insects) when spring gives way to summer.

Many other plants popular in urban and suburban landscapes aren't particularly helpful to pollinators and birds. Take time to learn how to transform your yard into an inviting oasis for birds now, and you'll be combating habitat loss effectively, one backyard at a time.

*Got a bird conservation tip to share? Contact **Colleen Nunn** at colleen.nunn@ecentral.com*

DFO NEWS

Help build DFO's nest egg . . . with a tax break!

Sue Summers and Roger Koester

Looking for ideas for charitable giving? That's not a question just for end-of-year financial decisions or even April 15 tax-time planning.

Beginning this month, *The Lark Bunting* will publish brief explanations from the DFO Finance Committee about ways to contribute to Denver Field Ornithologists while also taking advantage of giving strategies that save on your taxes.

First up: Qualified Charitable Distributions

Happy New Year! You might recall from the news last year that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, waived for 2020 the requirement that IRA holders older than 72 (or 70½ before Jan. 1, 2020) had to withdraw a required minimum amount of money from their retirement account. This year, that requirement is back — and with it, the need to pay income taxes on the taxable amount of that withdrawal.

Here's why this is important for charitable giving. People who take Required Minimum Distributions (or RMDs) can donate all or a portion of that distribution directly to a qualified nonprofit organization like DFO, and that portion of their IRA distribution will not be subject to income tax. They can do that any time during the year, as they make these required withdrawals from their retirement savings.

Such a donation is called a QCD, or Qualified Charitable Distribution. If you are now required to take a minimum distribution in 2021, consider this strategy to make some or all of it a QCD so the donation amount will be exempt from taxable income. Because this is a reduction of taxable income, you don't need to itemize your taxes to take advantage of this exemption, either.

But know this: The funds **must be donated directly** from your IRA to the charity. If funds are distributed personally to you and then donated, they don't qualify for the tax exemption.

Know this, too: There are additional restrictions that may apply to some individuals. For more about all of this and how it may apply to your specific situation, contact your tax adviser or retirement provider.

Joder Ranch Open Space: Fine foothills birding where Arabian horses once roamed



Chuck Hundertmark

In late June of 2016, my friend and fellow DFO member **Paul Slingsby** casually mentioned that I should try birding at a new place he'd been to about 3 miles north of Boulder. It was called the Interim Joder Ranch Trail, and it ran through the City of Boulder's latest open-space acquisition, Joder Ranch (pronounced "Yoder"). To tweak my interest, Paul mentioned that on June 20, he had found a Hammond's Flycatcher there.



When I checked the eBird hotspot, I found very few checklists, suggesting that birders had not yet discovered this location. Early the next month, I made my first visit. I found a small trailhead just off U.S. 36, and a trail that wends gradually through foothills grasslands to a Ponderosa pine woodland.



More specifically: The trail begins at 5,573 feet and gains 900 feet in elevation as it climbs through a nice variety of microhabitats. They include a small pond (Joder Reservoir), brushy drainages, farmsteads, and Ponderosa woodland on the upper slopes of a hogback.

I logged 34 species on that Aug. 8 visit, including Common Nighthawk, Blue Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting. Despite not finding the Hammond's that Paul had seen, I was hooked. Since that first visit, I've birded this former Arabian horse ranch several times a year and have logged observations for every month on the calendar.



From the Highway 36 trailhead, it's an out-and-back hike of roughly 2 miles each way. The trail ends at Old Stage Road, which has its own trailhead if you want to start at the top. There is no parking at that trailhead, but you can park a short distance away at Buckingham Park.



Doing so (as I sometimes do) adds about one-third of a mile – and a nice section of riparian woodland and brushy slopes. In summer, that riparian strip can host a singing Yellow-breasted Chat, and those slopes are home to Virginia's and MacGillivray's Warblers. There's also a short, rocky cliff where you'll often see White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows cruising along.

Joder Ranch is home to all three Colorado nuthatch species as well as six kinds of corvid: Steller's Jay, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Black-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven and Clark's Nutcracker (the last being rare). One of the resident Golden Eagles often puts in an appearance.

In 2019, I was pleasantly surprised to witness a male American Kestrel performing an undulating dance in mid-air for a nearby female. Sky dancing is one of the most dazzling aerial displays performed by raptors. Having seen the kestrel's dance raised an interesting

Scenes from Joder Ranch
Chuck Hundertmark
Green-tailed Towhee
Joder Ranch gate
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Steller's Jay
Photos by Chuck Hundertmark

Continued on page 11

taxonomic question. Not long ago, falcons were placed in a separate order from eagles, buteos and other raptors. Yet Golden Eagles, Northern Harriers, and Red-tailed Hawks, among others, also sky dance. Does this similar behavior among widely separate taxa reflect common ancestry . . . or parallel evolution? (Discuss)

The sudden outbreak in mid-October of the [CalWood Fire](#) threatened both Joder Ranch and adjacent Buckingham Park. Although the wildfire was moving south toward the ranch, firefighters contained it before it could reach the open space.

In the four years since I first visited Joder Ranch, the number of species recorded on eBird checklists there has risen to 121. More birders are beginning to visit, too, though the more than 160 checklists submitted are a rather modest number for such quality birding so close to town.

And despite my own number of early morning summer visits, I'm still looking to see or hear that Hammond's Flycatcher.

.....

Have you adopted a birding spot that has become your own "home patch" or a place you find yourself going back to again and again? Each month, *The Lark Bunting* features DFO member essays about the destinations they love. If you would like to share your thoughts about YOURS, email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. We'll help you create your own "Birding Close to Home." Thanks!



Black-crowned Night-Heron chicks
Patrick O'Driscoll

CONSERVATION CORNER

Citizen scientist: Your role in bird conservation?

Sharon Tinianow

As 2020 recedes in our rear-view mirror, many of us face 2021 with optimism, even though reality says things will still stay the way they are now for a while longer. In DFO, we know this too well. With the Covid-19 pandemic still with us, we haven't been able to gather in groups to bird together in 10 months.

But as individuals, every one of us *can* still go birding — and we can make those solo forays into nature really count for something by participating in citizen science projects that help protect and preserve the birds that draw us out.

As a term, "citizen science" has been around awhile. The numbers of "cit-sci" projects and participants are both increasing rapidly. In a nutshell, citizen science engages members of the public in gathering, using and interpreting data

Continued on page 13

according to specific scientific protocols. Because these data are collected long term and across large areas, they can provide a clearer picture of what is happening to bird populations than shorter or more geographically limited studies. That longer, broader view requires more eyes, ears and perspectives than professional scientists can possibly provide. This is especially true with birds, whose migratory habits mean they need to find suitable habitat in multiple places. Bird conservation relies on science and science needs you!

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a hub of citizen science for bird conservation. First among the lab's well-developed roster of programs is the **Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 12–15**. This joint project among the Cornell Lab, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada is a great way to kick off the new year. Every checklist helps researchers gauge how birds are doing. You can join and bird from anywhere, alone or with someone else, even if it's just for 15 minutes over the count's four-day window. Sign up to participate in this global effort at <https://www.birdcount.org>.

Your citizen science efforts are easier if you become proficient with *eBird*, the popular birder website and mobile app that lets you record your observations and submit them. Millions of observations recorded each month in eBird are logged in a central database at the Cornell Lab to build a global understanding of the distribution, abundance, and movements of thousands of bird species. Scientists, land managers, and others use it to document changes in bird distribution and pinpoint populations in need of conservation.

If you missed it, check out DFO's August 2020 program about using *eBird*, presented by members **Chuck Hundertmark** and **Gregg Goodrich**. You can find a recording of that live program on the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>. Chuck and Gregg provide step-by-step information and great advice about how *eBird* can help you improve your birding skills. Using *eBird* effectively makes any birding outing into citizen science.

February is also when cormorants, herons and egrets that left the Denver area for the winter begin returning to highly visible nesting sites to begin breeding, hatching and fledging another new generation. Their arrival also signals another season of observations for DFO's [Colonial Waterbirds Project](#).

Now entering its fifth year, this citizen science project gathers data on Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Snowy Egrets (and, on occasion, Cattle

Egrets) that nest at several locations in the metro area. If you're interested, view the introductory PowerPoint about the project at the DFO website's Citizen Science pages. Here's a direct link: https://dfobirds.org/Birds/CitizenScience/Colonial%20Waterbirds/WATERBIRDS_-_Overview-PowerPoint_REV_2021.pdf.

Another spring effort is the DFO-sponsored *HawkWatch at Dinosaur Ridge*, which runs March 1 through May 7 in cooperation with the Hawk Migration Association of North America. An introductory meeting on the Zoom webinar platform is planned for the evening of Feb. 23. For more information and to register to attend the Zoom meeting, contact coordinator **Dave Hill** at davidhill2357@gmail.com. You can also read more at www.hawkcount.org.

Colorado's Bird Conservancy of the Rockies runs two community science projects (its label for citizen science): *Bald Eagle Watch* (<https://www.birdconservancy.org/get-involved/volunteer/citizen-science/>) and the *Eastern Screech Owl Project* (<https://www.birdconservancy.org/get-involved/volunteer/citizen-science/>).

As the year progresses, Cornell Lab of Ornithology has three more projects to consider joining. *Celebrate Urban Birds* focuses, as you might expect, on birds in cities and metro areas. *Nestwatch* monitors bird nests to assess bird reproductive success. *Project Feeder Watch* participants observe backyard birds in winter, too. Find out more about all three on the lab's citizen science web pages here: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/engagement-in-science-and-nature/>.

As fall approaches, check in with HawkWatch International, which observes migrating raptors in a number of sites in the West. Although HawkWatch International suspended operations at some of its sites in 2020, those operations could resume in 2021 if the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic improves.

Engaging in these citizen science activities is important work, whether you're just using *eBird* to share data from your daily bird outing or getting training and certification for a more complex project. In the words of **Mary Ellen Hanibal**, author and citizen scientist, "We need to save nature. It is a crowd-sourced thing." In her talk for TEDxStanford (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC2S_jkUK0), Hanibal says, "Citizen science is a practice through which we get a better, healthier alignment with our own place in the cycle of life." And, if we have fun doing it, that's even better.

CONSERVATION

Chico Basin Ranch update: More talk, troubling questions for January meeting

Roger Koester and Patrick O'Driscoll

After several months of discussion about the future of Chico Basin Ranch as a destination for birders and the birds they love, a key decision in January about the state-owned ranch's next lease apparently has been postponed.

The Colorado State Land Board, which oversees the sprawling, bird-friendly cattle ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties, was to decide on a "Request for Proposals" (RFP for short) for leasing the property when the present lease expires in 2024. But the agenda for the board's Jan. 13 meeting now describes the session as another "workshop for discussion," not a decision-making moment.

Agenda packet materials, however, suggest that the board's staff will recommend a leasing path that may well jeopardize the arrangement that has allowed Colorado birders informal, self-guided access to the ranch for decades.

At issue for birders is whether the ranch and a number of non-agricultural uses on it, including birdwatching, will continue to be managed under a single lease, or be broken into separate or "layered" leases. According to the meeting materials, layered leasing is exactly what the board staff will recommend.

Under the present single lease, ranch operator Box T Partners (also known as Ranchlands) has allowed easy access for birders — including numerous popular DFO field trips over the years — for modest and reasonable daily fees. Splitting off non-agricultural uses such as birding into separate leases could end that practice.

Birding and the science related to it are of great concern at Chico Basin Ranch, where at least 345 bird species have been recorded through the years. Scientists conduct bird-related research on the ranch, which also hosts a prolific banding station run by the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. DFO and other organizations have emphasized in statements to the land board that birding at Chico Basin is not merely a recreational pursuit, but citizen science fieldwork of immense importance via the eBird worldwide database.

If birding is shunted off to a secondary lessee, economics would likely transform such use at Chico Basin Ranch dramatically. Today's year-round place for informal, inexpensive daytrip visits conceivably could become a seasonally restricted, expensive destination limited to overnight excursions under a "guest ranch" management model.

Even that scenario assumes birding would still continue. An informal survey by the land board staff of potential other bidders to lease the ranch generally suggested little interest in support of public recreation on the property.

The land board staff says the board's February meeting will be a decision-making session. Unclear, however, is whether the staff will recommend putting ranch leasing out to public bids or if the board will negotiate directly with Ranchlands to renew its lease.

Another major pending concern for the birding and conservation community may have been resolved. Earlier discussion about dividing the 86,000-acre property into two or three smaller ranches under separate leases apparently is off the table. An informal coalition of conservation organizations including DFO and led by Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of the National Audubon Society, has lobbied hard to keep Chico Basin intact to preserve its vital habitat and abundant birdlife. In fact, a two-page letter from The Nature Conservancy and the Palmer Land Conservancy of Colorado Springs urging that the ranch not be broken up is included in the meeting agenda materials.

"As The Nature Conservancy has stated time and again, relatively intact, 80,000-plus acre parcels are rare in Colorado, and the best conservation outcome is to keep it whole with one manager," said **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair of Aiken and a member of DFO. Hodges, too, has testified to the board that the property's "very high biodiversity and conservation values" would be jeopardized if the ranch were split up. She calls Chico Basin Ranch "a rare, intact parcel of prairie grassland which hosts grassland bird species, both of which are in serious decline."

In December, Hodges posted an update message to Colorado Field Ornithologists' COBirds list-serv about the continuing effort to protect Chico Basin Ranch. In noting how the issue "has led to new and stronger connections and partnerships" with birding and environmental organizations in Colorado, she specifically thanked DFO, which has joined the cause via the active involvement of the **conservation committee**.

"(W)hile many organizations have signed on to our letters," Hodges wrote, "DFO and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program stand out as having gone above and beyond to offer support, as have many individuals from all over the state. We are most thankful to you all."

DFO's conservation committee, which has monitored the ranch lease discussions for months, will update as needed after the January and February meetings for publication in the next (April) issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Volunteer? Raise your hand for DFO and the birds!



Bea Weaver

As a volunteer organization, Denver Field Ornithologists relies 100 percent on its members to step forward and give of themselves for the good of the club. Much of the work we do behind the scenes is on the committees that make DFO's activities go, from field trips to monthly programs to membership outreach and more.

This committee work isn't just "work," though. DFO committees provide member opportunities for involvement, socializing, and learning new things. If you would like to be part of the inner workings of DFO and make new birding friends, reach out to the contact person to find out more about a committee or other DFO activity. You will determine how little or how much you can commit of your time. Volunteering for DFO is fun!

Field Trip Committee

DFO Field Trip director and Field Trip Committee chair **Karen von Saltza** is looking for volunteers to help her in scheduling field outings, coordinating the annual DFO Field Trip Leader Forum, and other trip management and administration-related activities. Being a field trip leader is helpful but not required, as there are plenty of other important roles in this committee. Basic communication and computer skills are prerequisites, and a willingness to learn.

Interested? Contact Karen at kvonsaltza@yahoo.com or **Bea Weaver** of the DFO Nominations Committee at beamiami@aol.com.

Membership Committee

Membership Committee chair **Mary Cay Burger** is looking for volunteers interested in promoting DFO through membership outreach to other birders and those interested in birding. This is a new activity for this committee, so all ideas for recruiting new members, especially among young birders of all ages and backgrounds, are welcome.

If this interests you, contact Mary Cay at mcburger3@juno.com or Bea Weaver at beamiami@aol.com.

The Lark Bunting

Editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** of *The Lark Bunting*, is looking for DFO members who are curious, eager to learn and interested in writing and telling stories in words and photos for DFO's newsletter.

Like reading new books, guides and other volumes about birds? Come write reviews for us.

Enjoy DFO's monthly programs on birds and birding? Attend them and review them for the newsletter.

Got a favorite birding location and want to tell others about it? Write a "Birding Close to Home" essay about it and why it grabs you.

Want to scratch that storytelling itch? Contact Pat at patodrisk@gmail.com or 303-885-6955.

DFO Colonial Waterbirds Project

Now entering its fifth year, this citizen science project gathers data on the spring return, courtship, breeding, nesting and fledging of young in several species of large waterbirds and nest among us in highly visible colonies across metro Denver: egrets, herons and cormorants.

The project monitors communities at four local sites: Denver's Washington Park (Grasmere Lake) and Denver City Park (Duck and Ferril lakes), Lakewood's Belmar Park (Kountz Lake), and the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Tabor Lake).

If you're interested, go to the DFO website's Citizen Science page for a list of program documents, including an introductory PowerPoint presentation here: https://dfobirds.org/Birds/CitizenScience/Colonial%20Waterbirds/WATERBIRDS_-_Overview-PowerPoint_REV_2021.pdf

If you like the idea and want to help, contact project coordinator **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Welcome to new DFO members

Barbara Adams and Jennifer Foster Adams of Arvada; Nancy Bartholomew (Bartholomew-Drenth family), Lakewood; Yvonne Berg, Boulder; David Binkley and Marilyn Binkley, Highlands Ranch; Ann Bonnell (mother) and Mary Ann Bonnell, Wheat Ridge; Tom Booth, Littleton; Stephanie Boyles, Lakewood; Carolyn Sanders and Eric Boysen, Boulder; Lisa M. Carp and Lisa Carp, Louisville; Bayard and John Cobb, Denver; Frank Coons, Denver; Dickerson and Dwayne Dickerson, Denver; Tamara and Michael Dommermuth, Littleton; Shaunette Duncan, Littleton; Ruth Gabreski, Centennial; Myron Gerhard, Littleton; Celia Greenman, Lakewood; John Haycraft, Denver; Linda Hodges, Colorado Springs; Barbara Jones, Windsor; Jan Kardatzke, Broomfield; David and Meg Kenny, Denver; Mary Lou McCandless, Denver; Katherine and Steven Meier, Denver; Lynn Merrill, Boulder; Stephanie Mundis, Denver; Jim Nachel, Fort Collins; Potter Perryman and Eric Perryman, Denver; Timothy Saltonstall and Timothy Saltonstall, Longmont; Bridget Sanders, Centennial; Mary Melly and Aleksei Saunders, Aurora; Jeffrey Selleck, Lakewood; David Shafer, Lakewood; Jake Shorty, Denver; Peggy Stark, Littleton; Jennifer Stewart, Denver; Janine Turchini, Centennial; Barbara Thomas, Arvada, and Monica Lenahan and Newton Williams, Westminster

Thank you for your contributions

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Annie, Isaac, Orin and Troy Becker; Mary Beverly; Bonnie Boex; Ann Bonnell (mother) and Mary Ann Bonnell; R. Dale Brown; Dale Campau; Laurie Chotena; Karen Clark and Joe Lupfer; Linda and C. Raymond Clark; Dan and Carol Cook; Frank Coons; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Laurie Duke; Lee and Linda Farrell; Mary Geder; Julia Gwinn; Sonja and Grace Hahn; Jan and Doug Hodous; Roy Hohn; Mary Lou McCandless; Mary Melly and Aleksei Saunders; Larry Modesitt; Lynne Scholfield; Jeffrey Selleck; David Shafer; Lori Sharp; Jake Shorty; Paul Slingsby; Nancy and Bob Stocker; Ronald Villiotti; Bobbi Vollmer; Laura and Wayne Wathen; Thaddeus Wells and Thaddeus Wells; Robyn Winick and Jeremy Winick; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele; Mary Zick

In Memory of Richard Mendez

Jim Petri and Christie Owens

In Memory of Joe Roller

Lowell Baumunk and Peggy Wait; Sarah Bradley; Carol Cochran; Mary Keithler; Roger Koester; Rex McGehee; Bob Righter; Peg Scott; Margo Shimmel; Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland; Liz and Lynn Willcockson; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele

Friends of DFO

Annie, Isaac, Orin and Troy Becker; Mary Beverly; Susan Bowles; Margo Breen; Dale Campau; Jeff Christoffersen and Lisa Backman; Frank Coons; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Christopher Curwen; Linda Hodges; Roy Hohn; Chuck and Mary Metzger; Michael Monahan; Colleen Mansfield and Alan Peryam; Niña Routh; Jeffrey Selleck; Paul Slingsby; Sue Summers; Jan Justice Waddington; Laura and Wayne Wathen; Scott Yarberry

In Memory of Joe Roller

Sondra Bland and Bob Spencer; Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Diane Hutton



Hawk Migration Association of North America



Please join the **Hawk Watchers of Dinosaur Ridge**
for the 2021 season's introductory meeting via Zoom

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23
7 – 8:30 p.m.

Everyone is welcome!

**Hawk Watch is a DFO-sponsored, citizen science survey
of spring raptor migration along the foothills of the Front Range**

Come, volunteer this spring!
Watch hawks with the pros!
Participate just 1 day a week!
Observation period: **March 1 through May 7**
at Dinosaur Ridge

Registration required for Zoom meeting
Contact DAVE HILL at davidhill2357@gmail.com

+ + +

For an overview, visit HawkCount.org
[go to *Find a Hawkwatch: Dinosaur Ridge*]



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:

Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 04 | APRIL 2021

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A walk on the bright side
of Covid-19 and DFO

.....

DFO NEWS

It's almost DFO election time
(online again): Who wants to
be an officer or director?

.....

BIRDER FEATURE

Denver teen's 2020 "Big Year"
crashes through a Colorado
birding threshold

.....

PANDEMIC BIRDING

One year later, DFO'ers on
Covid shutdown: We miss field
trips — but we're still birding

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Ferruginous Hawk

📷 Rob Raker

📍 Chatfield Farms
Jefferson County





FROM THE PRESIDENT

A walk on the bright side of Covid-19 and DFO

Dave Hill

Birdie-birdie, everyone!

What a time these past 12 months have been for us. Can you believe that we're at ONE YEAR of the coronavirus, a year without DFO field trips? Who among us could've guessed a year ago that we would NOT be meeting now, elbow-to-elbow in the field and seated side-by-side at monthly programs, enjoying the birds together?

March 2021 is an anniversary nobody asked for, let alone one to celebrate. At one year and counting this week with the Covid-19 shutdown, things have certainly changed for Denver Field Ornithologists. And yet, DFO has adapted the best that we could. Looking back, consider what we've accomplished. For a few minutes, take a walk on the bright side with me.

Our transition from in-person evening programs to virtual meetings via the Zoom webinar app has gone fabulously well. Without question, it is the silver lining for DFO in a challenging year without many visible successes. Gathering online with this marvelous technology has dramatically increased our ability to reach out and present more frequent evening programs to you and to the general public. In the next two months alone, we have FOUR more such presentations planned.

Our ability now to bring in "name" presenters from across the country, at far more modest expense than we could in person, has expanded the scope of what and who we can present. Not surprisingly, our DFO program audiences have doubled, tripled, even quadrupled over the numbers we hosted before the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Zoom platform has also enabled us to keep the volunteer business of DFO going, from board and committee meetings to our club's more dynamic involvement on issues of birds and habitat conservation — like the future fate of birding at Chico Basin Ranch, a favorite DFO field trip destination.

Speaking of field trips: Even though we had to shut down

in-person outings to be safe through the pandemic, DFO has experimented with an out-of-the-box idea for virtual group trips. Participants bird "together apart" in the field and then share the experience together a couple of days later in a group Zoom meet-up. **Gregg Goodrich**, an enthusiastic DFO field trip leader, has gamely shown that such virtual experiences (three so far and more to come on the [DFO Field Trips page](#)) have communal value and person-to-person worth.

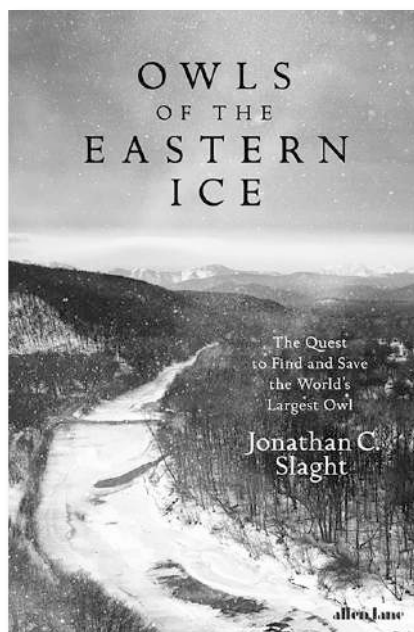
Of course, now that Covid-19 vaccinations are underway, the question on everyone's mind is: When can we go back to group field trips again? As we turn that corner, things look encouraging. I am writing this on the evening of February 28, hours after our quarterly DFO board meeting heard hopeful words from **Karen von Saltza**, DFO's field trip director. She plans to convene the Field Trip Committee soon to determine what we can do and when we'll be able to do it. We're also moving to reorganize our annual Spring Count so that volunteers can bird individually or by household in each of the eight count areas and log their findings into eBird. That way we can still register more vital data from local places we all care about without putting anyone at risk.

In every case, I applaud your support as members through these difficult times. I'm as impatient as you are to return to a full schedule of in-person DFO field trips.

A couple of more thoughts before I say so long until next month:

- HawkWatch at Dinosaur Ridge began its spring season on February 23 with an information meeting via Zoom. Twenty-one eager volunteers have joined this citizen science effort supported by DFO. But we need more! Check out the latest "12 tips for '21" on the next page for all the details. You can also email me with questions or to join the effort, at davidhill2357@gmail.com, or phone me at 303-796-0638.

Continued on page 3



- I just finished reading *Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl*, by **Jonathan C. Slaght**. It is the terrifically exciting story of Slaght's pursuit of Blakiston's Fish Owls in the Russian Far East. It is part-science narrative, part-memoir, part-adventure — captivating, thrilling and beautifully written. The book has received numerous accolades (a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2020, best-of-the-year note by National Public Radio, etc.). I'm telling you, DFO members, you will love this book.

And how about you? What books about birds and birding have you read lately? Drop me a note and let's share with the rest of our DFO friends.

That's it until next time. Cheers and chirps!

— Dave

CONSERVATION

12 Tips for '21: Raptor lover? Come watch @ HawkWatch!

*Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. **12 for '21** aims to tell readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily activities. Look for more each month throughout 2021.*

Susan Blansett

Monday, March 1, marked the beginning of the HawkWatch at Dinosaur Ridge spring count. Almost every day through May 7, raptor-loving DFO volunteers will make the short hike to the Dinosaur Ridge HawkWatch site near Morrison to tally migrating eagles, hawks, falcons and vultures.

Migrant raptors soar over Dinosaur Ridge because of its uplifting air currents that ease their seasonal passage. Denver Field Ornithologists sponsors this annual event, and more volunteers are needed. Choose your own schedule, and join us!

Dinosaur Ridge is Colorado's only seasonal raptor migration observation post and one of the best for spotting these magnificent birds moving along the Front Range of the Rockies. The season runs March 1 through May 7, and on a good day, dozens of raptors can pass overhead.

We need enough volunteers to keep eyes on the birds 7 days a week, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Birders of all skill levels are welcome. HawkWatch is a great way to learn raptor ID, build your skills and make friends (socially distanced, of course).

For more information, and to join our enthusiastic volunteer corps, contact DFO President **Dave Hill** at davidhill2357@gmail.com or phone him at 303-796-0638 or 303-870-4316.

*Got a bird or birding conservation tip to share? Contact **Colleen Nunn** of the DFO Conservation Committee at colleen.nunn@ecentral.com*



Cori Carver



Erik Funk

From Redpoll Plumage to Chickadee Poop: Insights into Avian Evolution and Ecology

Cori Carver and Erik Funk
Monday, March 8, 2021
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

On the heels of February's monthly program by 2019 DFO research grantee **Erin Bissell** of Metropolitan State University, join us for this special March presentation (co-sponsored by Denver Public Library) featuring two recipients of 2020 grants from Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education, and Conservation Grants Fund.

Black-capped and Mountain chickadees are frequently seen along Colorado's Front Range, where increasing urbanization has altered the tree species present. That change in the increasingly suburbanized forest has disrupted the food available for insectivorous birds like chickadees, potentially disrupting their breeding success as well.

For her DFO-funded research, CU Boulder undergraduate **Cori Carver** monitored chickadee breeding from Boulder to Nederland, conducting arthropod surveys and analyzing fecal samples from nestlings to determine the effects of human development and activity on the habitats of songbirds.

Meanwhile . . . Redpolls! Those nomadic finches of the North are notorious for presenting identification challenges and a long history of taxonomic debate. CU Boulder doctoral student **Erik Funk** examined the genetic basis of certain redpoll traits to better understand the evolutionary mechanism involved and whether it is resulting in the formation of new species or maintaining variation within the species.

To register for this special double program with scientists supported by *your* DFO donations, go to this Zoom webinar link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_lkTQ67pHSAufjQuZbNy2dw

MONTHLY PROGRAM



Hummingbirds: Small Wonders

Sheri L. Williamson
Monday, March 22, 2021
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

They may be tiny, but hummingbirds know how to live large. Dazzling colors, fearless personalities, voracious appetites, continent-spanning migrations, "singing" feathers, and sometimes scandalous personal lives are just a few of the qualities that have earned these miniature marvels a devoted following far beyond the birding community.

Join internationally known hummingbird researcher **Sheri Williamson** for an evening with these small wonders at DFO's monthly program for March, co-sponsored by Denver Public Library. As adaptable as they are, hummingbirds are vulnerable to many of the same environmental crises as other migratory birds — loss of habitat and food resources, pollution, and the effects of climate change. Good news: Almost anyone in North America can help build a brighter future for hummingbirds with a few simple actions.

Williamson, a lifelong naturalist, birder and conservationist, is co-founder and director/naturalist of the [Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory](#). She recently completed a major revision of *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America* in the Peterson Field Guide Series, first published in 2002, and she'll provide a sneak peek at this revised edition.

To register for this monthly DFO program, go to this Zoom webinar link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_yRWkWrQPQFSIYA2YQ7ODcQ



Broad-Tailed Hummingbird female
Jim Esten

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

PUBLICATION

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Patrick O'Driscoll

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There and Back: Waterfowl and More

Richard Crossley
Monday, April 5, 2021
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

In this special DFO presentation co-sponsored by Denver Public Library, here's how the acclaimed birder, photographer and guidebook author **Richard Crossley** intends to tell it: "One morning Richard woke up and decided he needed to drive to the Arctic Ocean – from his home in Cape May, NJ," the famous East Coast Mecca for birds and birders where he settled 30 years ago.

Crossley will talk, with good humor and the thick accent of his native Yorkshire, England, "about his 16,000-mile adventure, living in his car, the inspiring people he met, and places he went. Did it shape *The Crossley ID Guide: Waterfowl*? Would he recommend you do the same trip? . . . (Those) are just two of the many questions that Richard will address. The answers will surprise you."

He is best known for the iconoclastic field books that bear his name. The *Crossley ID Guides* are youth-focused, photo-packed handbooks oriented more to what birders actually see in the field and less to overly detailed explanatory text. They contain individual color plates for hundreds of species, Photoshopped with thousands of his own images into rich collages set in typical habitat for each. The result, as described on [Crossley's website](#), challenges "many of the traditional 'old-school' book layouts. This allows kids and beginners a better understanding of the looks and lives of birds."

The waterfowl guide mentioned above was Crossley's fifth, after "Shorebirds," "Eastern Birds" (USA), "Raptors" and "Britain and Ireland." And now, a new Crossley ID Guide, "Western Birds," is coming out in March, just weeks before his DFO presentation.

He got into the guidebook game after 20 years working in the business world and raising two children with his wife, **Debra**. At the turn of the millennium, one of his "frequent mid-life crises" inspired Crossley "to spend less time obsessively birding and to focus on paying it forward." After co-authoring *The Shorebird Guide* in 2006, his new obsession became digital tech and innovative book design — sharing his love for birds to connect people "to a fuller appreciation and understanding of nature and its benefits to mind, body, and soul."

Crossley is co-founder of the global birding initiative [Pledge to Fledge](#), Race4Birds and The Cape May Young Birders Club. He also has served on the board of directors of the [Hawk Mountain Sanctuary](#) in Pennsylvania.

To register for this special program, go to this Zoom webinar link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_clJy-z_JRN6c9-xunKNSpQ





Go Birding in Bad (aka *the Right*) Weather

Bryan Guarente
Monday, April 19, 2021
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

DFO's monthly program for April, set ahead to the third Monday because of a scheduling conflict, features a Colorado birder and weather expert familiar to readers of the COBirds list-serv whenever major weather, especially in spring, sets up over our region as migrating birds make their way north.

Bryan Guarente, who trains meteorologists at Boulder's UCAR, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, has extended his work to help the birding community understand the relationship between weather and bird migration. He notes that wayward birds forced down by weather "got here on the power of their own wings, fat reserves, hormones, and no doubt with the help of the wind."

Bad weather for these "vagrant spring migrants" — off-course, in need of food and shelter — is the right weather for those of us who get out in it to see unexpected rarities. As 2021's spring migration cranks up, join Guarente as he shows us some of those spring vagrants and "how the weather tells us their intriguing migration story."

Look for more details about this program, co-sponsored by Denver Public Library, in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Welcome to new DFO members

Kent Bagley of Littleton; Sofia Prado-Irwin and Sofia Prado-Irwin, Denver; Carol Cwiklinski, Lakewood; Billy A. Harris Jr. and Linda Purcell, Denver; Martha Delporte, Lakewood; Nona Radin, Denver; Laurel Fulton, Denver; Barbara Retzlaff, Boulder; Vicki Grunski, Centennial; Ellen Schwenne, Longmont; Dominique and Thomas Loucks, Greenwood Village; Candace Tomlinson, Wheat Ridge; Sarah Pascoe, Denver; Diane Wagner, Englewood; Janet Peters, Littleton; Jillian Way and Justin Way, Denver; Scott Hatch, Arvada; Tamra Moore, Golden; Kaily Meek, Denver, and Steven G Schwartz and Alice Tariot, Golden

Thank you for your contributions

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Meredith Anderson; Linda Doran; Helen Berkman; Laurel Fulton; Karel Buckley; Suzanne Grady; Tom and Mary Cay Burger; Judy Lane "In Memory of Joe Roller"; Carol Coe; Sarah Pascoe; Tom Pool and Kitsi Atkinson; John and Peggy Gonder; Deborah Carstensen; Terry and Becca Hammons; Judy and Rick Creswell; Bruce and Charlene Warneke; Jeff Dawson, and Robert and Allison Waters

Friends of DFO (general fund)

Tom Reilly and Frances Campbell; Mary Fran O'Connor; Audrey Gilden; Diane Wagner; Angela Grun; Robert Beck; Elissa McAlear; Jill Boice; Richard O'Leary; Terry and Becca Hammons, and Rob and Michele Worrall

It's almost DFO election time (online again): Who wants to be an officer or director?

Bea Weaver

The annual election for officers and board members for Denver Field Ornithologists is coming in April. It will be held with online balloting beginning **April 13** and ending **April 27**. All DFO members in good standing will be able to vote for a new president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer, as well as for several members of the DFO Board of Directors.

Any DFO members also may nominate themselves or another member in good standing (with consent) for *any* of these elective officers. The DFO Nominating Committee has recruited and nominated at least one candidate for each position or vacancy, but any and all additional nominations will also be accepted until **Saturday, April 10**.

The nominating process is simple: Contact Nominating Committee chair **Bea Weaver** at beamiami@aol.com or by phone at 305-498-5935 or 303-999-0689. She can also answer questions about the election and the roles of the officers and directors.

The Lark Bunting will publish an article about all the candidates, including brief background bios, in the newsletter's next issue, which will be published about a week before voting begins. If you are interested in serving as an officer or on the board, please note the following deadline:

To include additional candidate names and background in that pre-election article in early April, additional nominees should submit their names and bio information (and "headshot" photo if available) **no later than Wednesday, March 31**, which is the deadline for the next issue of the newsletter. Background/ bio information should be submitted to Nominating Committee chair Weaver at the same address and phone numbers above.

DFO president **Dave Hill** is completing his second year in office and will not run again. (As immediate past president, he will remain a member of the Executive Committee and the board for up to two years.) DFO vice president **Susan**

Blansett is a candidate to succeed Hill as president. **Sharon Tinianow**, a member of the DFO Board and chair of the club's Communications & Outreach Committee, is a candidate for vice president.

DFO Treasurer **Sue Summers** and Secretary **Peter Stolz** both are candidates for re-election to 1-year terms in their positions. So are two members of the DFO board whose 3-year terms are expiring: **Karen Drozda** and **Patrick O'Driscoll**. DFO Grants Committee chair **Elaine Wagner**, who joined the board provisionally in late 2020 by board vote, is now a candidate for a full 3-year director term. In addition, **Steve Ryder**, a member and past chair of the DFO Conservation Committee, is a candidate for a 3-year term on the DFO board for the first time.

For the second straight year, in-person balloting in the DFO election will be replaced by an online vote — and that change will become permanent in future years.

Until 2020, DFO's annual elections were always held in person at the annual general meeting on the fourth Monday in April. But after the Covid-19 outbreak put all public club gatherings on hold, DFO held the election via email and the Survey Monkey online app. This year's election will be the same.

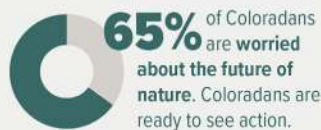
After seeing how participation in the online voting last year doubled over the average attendance at in-person election meetings, the DFO Board voted on Feb. 28 to change the club bylaws to make future elections electronic, too.

Online voting via Survey Monkey — an internet balloting app that automatically tabulates the results — will begin on **Tuesday, April 13** and run for two weeks, through **Tuesday, April 27**. All members will receive an email with voting directions. Anyone without computer access may contact Weaver at the numbers listed above to cast votes by telephone. Ballots will be counted after that date and the election results announced via "blast" email to all DFO members.

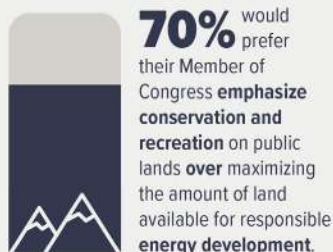
Colorado College's State of the Rockies Project
2021 Conservation in the West Poll

COLORADO

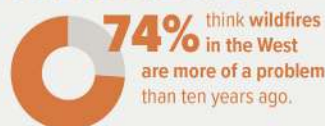
READY FOR BOLD ACTION



ENERGY ON PUBLIC LANDS



FIRE IN THE WEST



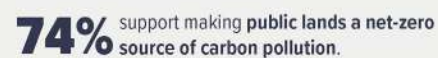
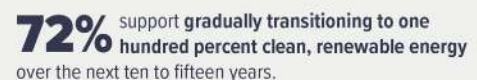
PROTECTING LAND, WATER & WILDLIFE



CONSERVATION FUNDING



ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE



coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest

CONSERVATION

Coloradans lead West in conservation concerns in Colorado College's State of Rockies poll

Each year since 2011, Colorado College's ongoing State of the Rockies Project has conducted its annual Conservation in the West Survey to gauge how residents of western states feel about climate change, conservation and the environment. The random-sample poll collects responses from at least 400 residents in each of eight western states including Colorado.

At a time when the U.S. is experiencing a nearly unprecedented political divide, it's reassuring that this year's poll showed a tendency among both conservatives and liberals to agree on such threats as pollinator health, drought, wildfires, and the causes of climate change.

The response from Coloradans in particular shows they are among those in the West most concerned about protecting our waterways, wildlife and landscapes. The poster above summarizes Coloradans' responses from the poll report.

To read all the poll questions, answers and results, broken down by state and topic, go to the survey report at this link: <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2021/index.html>

DFO awards 6 bird research grants for 2021

Patrick O'Driscoll

Six bird-related Colorado research projects — ranging from measuring the effect of climate change on bird lifespan to what effect grazing management has on Great Plains birds of prey — will receive about \$7,500 in grants this year from Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Conservation & Education Grants Fund.

The avian subjects of the winning research proposals range widely by species and location: Great Blue Herons on the Western Slope, hawks, eagles and owls in northeastern Colorado, and chickadees, House Wrens and an array of feeder birds at points along the urban-rural Front Range from metro Denver to Fort Collins.

"The topics emphasize conservation as well as scientific research," said **Elaine Wagner**, chair of the grants committee that reviewed the proposals and recommended them to the DFO Board for approval. The board accepted the recommendations and approved grants totaling \$7,478 at its quarterly meeting Feb. 28.

"We can look forward to learning from them in the future," Wagner added. "And the benefits to birds extend to launching young researchers, as most (of the projects) include field work as well as laboratory methods." Four of the grantees are college undergraduate students, one is a doctoral degree candidate, and one is a scientist employed in professional practice.

One study seeks to gauge the effect of climate change on bird lifespan by measuring changes in genome-protecting portions of DNA called telomeres. Another explores hybridizing between unrelated family trees of a familiar Colorado backyard songbird.

Two separate projects from the same institution examine vital aspects of food, habitat and environment for baby Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees. One focuses on urbanization's effect on nestling development, while the other examines the role that non-native trees play in nestlings' diet.

These and other projects are funded annually from the generosity of DFO members and other donors. DFO first awarded these modest grants in 1994 when **Mary Hope Robinson** donated \$15,000 to establish the DFO Educational Endowment Fund. DFO changed the name in 2012.

Here are the projects for 2021 by title, grant recipient names, institutional affiliations, any advisers/co-investigators (in parentheses), and grant amounts:

Hybridization between nonsister lineages of House Wren (Troglodytes aedon) along the Front Range of Colorado

William Church Anderson, University of Colorado Boulder (Scott Taylor) — \$1,000

Evaluating the Breeding Season Home Range and Foraging Habitats of the Slate River Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias)

Jake Bartholomew, Western Colorado University (Patrick Magee) — \$1,718

Exploring the Effects of Non-native Tree Species on Chickadee Nestling Diet

Cori Carver, CU Boulder (Kathryn Grabenstein, Scott Taylor) — \$1,485

Assessing Relationships between Grazing Management and the Abundance and Productivity of Northeastern Colorado Raptors

James Dwyer, EDM International, Inc. — \$750

Exploring the Effects of Urbanization and Elevation on Chickadee Nestling Development

Mia Larriau, CU Boulder (Scott Taylor) — \$2,000

Rate of Avian Telomere Shortening Across DNA Sample Types

Noelle Mason, Colorado State University (Kristen Ruegg) — \$525

Continued on page 11

Two of the projects — Carver's chickadee diet study and Bartholomew's heron research — received DFO grants in previous years for earlier stages of research.

DFO received 10 applications this year from researchers, conservationists and educators — twice as many applications as in 2020. After the Feb. 1 deadline, members of the Research, Conservation & Education Grants Committee (Wagner, **Mary Fran O'Connor**, **Tina Jones**, and DFO president **Dave Hill**, acting in his *ex officio* capacity) read and reviewed the applications before meeting Feb. 22 to discuss and choose which to recommend for funding.

With \$7,700 available for grants, the committee was able to recommend funding the full amount of each winning request. Researchers often spread their budget needs for projects like these among multiple funding sources such as DFO and other birding, wildlife and conservation organizations.

Look for an article in a forthcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting* that will summarize and explain the grant-winning projects in more detail.

JANUARY PROGRAM REVIEW

Never thought about birds' ears? Then listen up . . . and learn an earful

Patrick O'Driscoll

To be honest, I had not “Ever Thought About Birds’ Ears?” until I attended Denver ornithologist **Garth Spellman**’s fascinating DFO Zoom webinar in January with that question for a title. Who knew?

Not I — and I’d wager not many others in the audience of about 150 viewer-listeners to DFO’s fourth-Monday monthly program on January 25. Why would we? “It’s hard to explain at a cocktail party that you’re studying bird ears,” said Spellman, the curator of ornithology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. “When we look at birds, we hardly ever see the ears.”

But they are there, aren’t they — hidden beneath those auricular feathers, also known as the “ear patch.” It’s that all-but-forgotten spot on the bird anatomy chart, somewhere below the eye and back a little from the cheek and bill. Underneath and inside lies a wondrous mechanism (as is every ear, human or animal).

Spellman and **John Peacock**, a post-doctoral associate at the CU Med School in Aurora, are investigating the mysteries of avian middle and inner ears, and how and why birds don’t lose their hearing over time, as most humans do. (Also on the research team are **Nathaniel Greene** and **Daniel Tollin**.) Spellman said this is rather uncharted territory. Searching online databases for research articles and references from the past 100 years, he found 255,000 about “bird song,” but just 14,700 for “bird hearing.” We think about birds as producers of sound, he noted, but “we don’t think much about birds as sound receivers.”

View the complete video of “Have You Ever Thought About Birds’ Ears? Evolution of the Avian Inner Ear” in DFO’s “Past Programs” archive:

<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

And yet, audio communication is critical to birds’ survival and success — how they attract and find mates, defend territory, and heed alarms when predators are about.

Spellman and his research colleagues are delving into the mechanics of the avian ear in the same way that scientists examine human ears — by dissecting their cadavers. In this case, bird cadavers salvaged and stored in freezers at Spellman’s museum.

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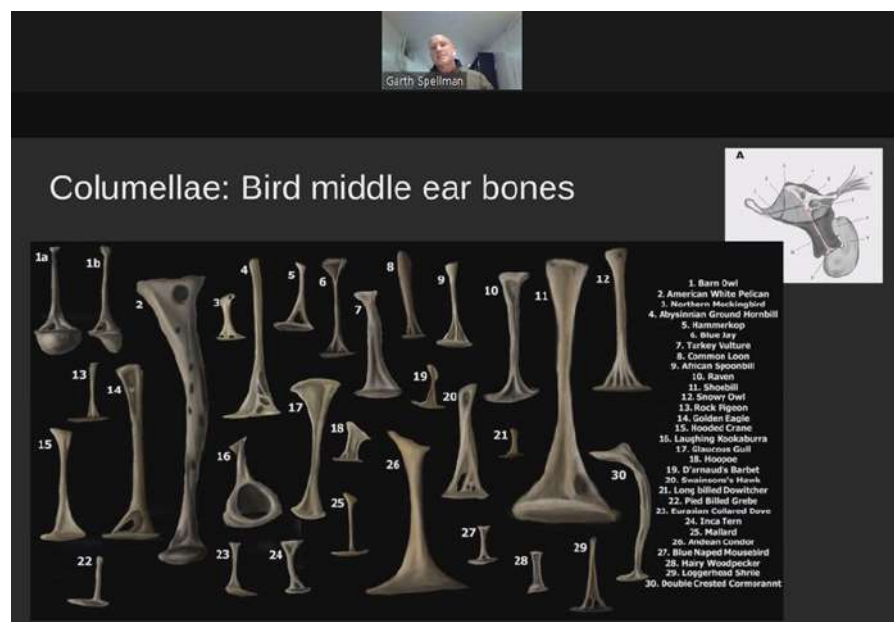


Chart of bird middle ear bones

They've already examined, measured and compared to each other the ear structures of nearly 50 species from 23 orders and 34 families of birds: fliers, divers, land and sea birds, woodpeckers, pelicans, ostriches.

The prime focus of their study is the bony columella, the single, sound-transmitting bone in the avian inner ear. (The human middle ear has several.) The range in sizes and shapes is so broad that a chart showing columellae of dozens of species looks at first like some archaeologist's collection of prehistoric caveman clubs or maybe a poster of exotic mushrooms.

Not surprisingly, one of his team's techniques is to insert tiny measuring devices into both ends of a dead bird's ear, pipe in sounds at different frequencies and loudness levels, and measure the vibrations off the "footplate" of the columella with a laser vibrometer to map the energy transfer curve of sound energy. They also use an electron microscope to scan bird cadaver ears in quest of understanding how middle-ear structure relates to bird behavior and evolution.

"We're hoping . . . not only to understand bird hearing, but how and why bird hearing doesn't diminish over time," Spellman added, and so understand and deal with hearing loss in humans.

Sprinkled through Spellman's presentation was a potpourri of bird-ear factoids, among them:

- The ears of Barn Owls are offset — right ear lower than the left — as an apparent aid in calculating the location of prey when turning their sound-collecting facial disc to hear their movements
- The cochlear "hair" cells in birds' inner ears regenerate through life, something human cochlear cells do not
- A number of birds have what Spellman calls "extreme lifestyles" that ought to damage their hearing but don't — the impact of Northern Flickers drumming on metal chimney caps or streetlights, for instance, or Northern Gannets and any number of kingfisher species diving straight down and slamming into the water in pursuit of fish.

Spellman even imagines using this research to reconstruct what prehistoric relatives of birds might have heard with their own ears: "We can actually use CT scans to study columellae of an extinct dinosaur like a T-Rex and, by using a model that we've constructed from this work, figure out what was it that a T-Rex heard, if anything."

Throughout his hour-long presentation, Spellman emphasized that what he and Peacock are now studying represents "baby steps" on the way to understanding the evolution of birds' ears, and that there's more to come: "Everyone's going to have to stay tuned and come back."

After Chatfield Reservoir expansion, how are birds and habitat doing? Read on . . .

Patrick O'Driscoll

For many of us, the wounds have not fully healed from the “Save Chatfield” battle against reservoir expansion in Chatfield State Park. After that four-year legal fight was finally lost in 2017, everyone braced for tree-killing construction to increase water storage in the federally owned reservoir at the expense of riverside habitat for wildlife in a destination vital to birds and loved by birders.

But before construction cranked up, a Metropolitan State University assistant professor of biology and her students moved in ahead of the bulldozers to gather data on bird and plant diversity in areas that would be affected. After the reservoir “reallocation” project was finished, the team returned to begin monitoring change in the birds and the weeds and the trees.

If Metro State botanist **Erin Bissell** has her way, she and her research students will continue to do so for decades to come. “I’m committed to this project on that kind of time scale,” Bissell told her DFO monthly program audience of about 160 listener-viewers on February 22 via Zoom webinar. Besides, as a practical matter, it will take some time to draw solid conclusions about what effect the project’s disruption to Chatfield’s Plains cottonwood forests and the winged creatures that inhabit them will have.

View the complete video of “The Birds and the Weeds: Ecological Response to the Chatfield Reallocation Project” in DFO’s “Past Programs” archive:
<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

After explaining how she and her team designed the project, Bissell offered preliminary findings from four seasons of monitoring research to show Denver Field Ornithologists how she put to good use the \$1,800 research grant DFO awarded her in 2019.

So far, she said, the effect of tree removal in 10 younger “stand communities” of skinny, dense trees along part of the South Platte River below Kingfisher Bridge and along narrower Plum Creek appears to be “marginal increase” in shrubs and grasses. That’s because more growth-boosting light reaches the ground wherever the thick tree canopy was reduced.

At the same time, however, tree removal in five “legacy forest” areas of taller, mature cottonwoods upstream from Kingfisher Bridge appears to have lessened “bird abundancy” in those areas — fewer birds than researchers found in their pre-construction field visits.

Careful not to draw conclusions yet, Bissell offered speculative questions that it will take more seasons of data and analysis to answer or dismiss. Do birds prefer more open sites, perhaps because they allow them to find food and prey and spot and avoid predators more easily? Or is it just easier for researchers to see and hear more birds in less-dense forests?

She added that so far, bird “richness” — the number of species in each study location — did not appear to be affected. But Bissell also said the intermittent and unpredictable flooding of the project’s 586 acres of new capacity whenever high spring runoff allows “may kill more trees over time.” The areas cleared of habitat “are not going to be inundated year-round or every year,” she noted. But like everything else relating to water storage and use in the West, the effects will depend on timing and duration — early or late, short or long.

Bissell acknowledged from the start that she is a botanist, not a bird scientist. But she spent part of her presentation recognizing her team of about a dozen Metro State students and three post-graduate colleagues for expertly gathering and helping analyze field data about both the birds (predominantly passerines) and the plants (cottonwoods, shrubs and weeds)

Continued on page 17



BIRDER FEATURE

Denver teen's 2020 "Big Year" crashes through a Colorado birding threshold

Patrick O'Driscoll

OK, Colorado birders, take your pick: If there's a Holy Grail for Centennial State birding, which is it — joining the uniquely Colorado "Fourteener/400 Club" of climbing and birding, or logging a 400-species statewide "Big Year"?

At first gasp (for breath), it's hard to imagine a more challenging *lifelong* feat than summing all 58 of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks *and* seeing at least 400 of the 513 bird species ever recorded in the state. Few of us could pull it off — in fact, only TWELVE people have.

But what about finding 400 or more avian species in Colorado in a *single* year? Many have tried, but only ONE person, naturalist **Cole Wild** of Loveland, had done it (412 species in 2010) . . . until now.

Are you ready for this? Meet *another* Colorado Big Year birder named Cole, who just cracked that elusive single-year mark of 400 species in 2020. And get this: **Cole Sage** of Denver was only age 16 when he started and 17 when he finished his Big Year. And if recording 405 species in one calendar year wasn't enough, young Cole also took pretty good photographs of 390 of them.

But wait, there's more! Not yet in possession of his first driver's license, Cole needed designated drivers as he logged nearly 35,000 road miles through 56 of Colorado's 64 counties. Behind the wheel but along for the ride were his parents, self-described "amateurs" **Beth** and **Dave Sage**. They had Big Years, too: Mom passed the 400-species mark (403), and Dad recorded 374.

"I'm still a kind of tag-along birder," said Dave. "Beth is a better birder than I am." Added Beth: "We're both beginners." Once, maybe, but not anymore. "Cole made sure he got us on all the birds we needed," said Dave, not sounding like a rookie.

"I got pretty hooked on birding, albeit I didn't know what I was doing," said Cole, now 18. A quick study, he became a good birder largely on his own, starting at age 5. The family moved to Colorado from California in 2008, and "when we first got to Denver, we stayed with my parents," Dave Sage recalled. Cole's grandmother "had feeders out in back, and Cole was excited about that."

"The birds were just common backyard stuff," Cole said, "but seeing them up close was cool." Before long, with bird books borrowed from his grandmother, and an old pair of stadium binoculars, he soon had a list of 20-25 yard birds in his own backyard. His parents began taking him to local parks, then state parks. "They thought my birding was really cool because they have always been outdoorsy people, fishing, camping trips," he said. On his first trip to Barr Lake, "I got about 50 birds I'd never seen before." Young Cole was hooked indeed.

"We home-school Cole, so we're always doing nature activities," said Beth. "He was certainly exposed to a lot." Still, she assumed his birding might be "just a passing fancy, not anything different than singing in the choir or hockey and baseball."

Continued on page 15



But three or four years ago, her son was already thinking big after watching *The Big Year*, the Hollywood movie based on Denver journalist and birder **Mark Obmascik**'s 2004 bestseller about an epic competition among three obsessed birders. "I said, 'Man, I want to count how many birds I'm seeing,'" Cole recalled. "I thought that would be cool and fun to do. And then I thought, 'I wonder what the record is?'"

He soon found out. State record holder Cole Wild, only 25 himself when he set the first 400-plus-species Colorado mark, had written a book about it (with Fort Collins biologist and birding guide **Nick Komar**), *Wild Birding Colorado: The Big Year of 2010*. Having seen the movie and read both Obmascik's and Wild's books, young Cole popped the question to his parents in autumn 2019. "I had seen lots of stuff in the state," he said, "but I was interested in seeing new birds. I thought 400 would be a major stretch." Ya' think?

Dave and Beth were game, if not quite certain what Cole's quest would entail. "I don't know how I convinced them to do it," he said. "I said doing it wouldn't really change how much we were birding, I just would be more strategic." He made spreadsheets. He prioritized species from most to least common and by season. He pored over eBird data.

"He was the project manager, the trip planner," Beth said. "Dave and I switched on the driving, but Cole absolutely drove where we were going, what we were going to see, the time it would take."

The only ground rule was about school: If Cole kept up with 2020's two demanding high-school semesters of sophomore-junior study, they would drive him wherever he needed to go on weekends and chase rarities that showed up during the week. Home-school flexibility definitely helped.

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"My teachers are really good. They drive me places to see things," Cole said, only half-joking. He began to push his schoolwork schedule ahead so that "if something really rare showed up, I could drop everything and chase it."

"I never told him no," his mother added. "But he would bring schoolwork along in the car. Allowing him the freedom to manage (his schoolwork) really matured him over the past year. He never wanted to face not being able to chase something."

From species No. 1 on New Year's Day (American Tree Sparrow) to species No. 405 in mid-December (Western Screech-Owl), their year-long odyssey was a testament to family, Cole's meticulous pre-planning and, as in any successful Big Year, plain luck, much of it good.

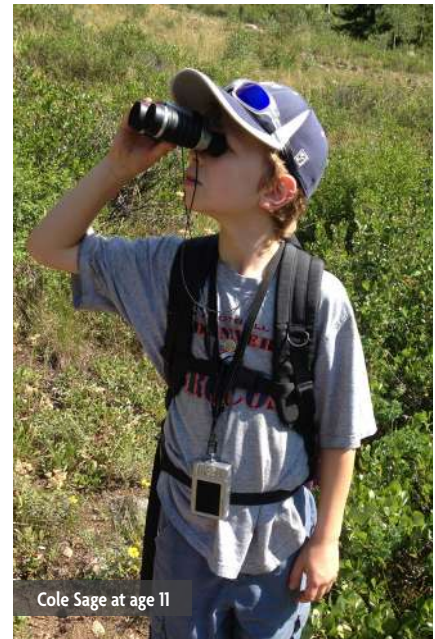
The unplanned intrusion of Covid-19 played an unexpectedly positive role. Even with pandemic restrictions and precautions, "Covid sort of put everything else on pause, which ended up being incredible for me," Cole said "The big thing was baseball. I normally play spring and fall" — second base and right-handed pitcher for the Denver Eagles, a team of home-school teens. But when spring ball was called on account of pandemic, Cole had more time to bird.

Pandemic birding also drew more birders into the field, more often and in more places. That led to more rare and uncommon sightings and chases. According to eBird, 51 birders recorded more than 300 Colorado species in 2020, 40 percent more than did so in 2019. Not coincidentally, three other young birding friends of Cole — **Pablo Quezada**, **Ben Sampson** and **Luke Pheneger** — finished Nos. 3, 4 and 6 on eBird's list of birders with the most Colorado species in 2020.

The year launched like a rocket: four holiday vacation days of wall-to-wall birding. By the time school resumed on Jan. 5, Cole already had 73 species. By the end of February, he had 142. Because the school year ended in late April, he pounced on spring migration at its peak. In May alone, Cole registered 90 more species, 20 of them in one long day across four east-southeast Colorado counties. By the end of June, he had 353 species with half a year still to go. That was just one species short of the highest count by anyone in Colorado in all of 2019.

Amazingly, Cole spent just 189 days of actual birding — barely half a calendar year. January through October were still filled with 12-hour weekend days, a couple of all-nighters, and sporadic weekday chases. Most memorable was on Tuesday, Oct. 20, when he and Beth trekked to far southwestern Colorado for species No. 395, the first-ever Ruddy Ground Dove recorded in the state. Leaving well before dawn, they drove six hours to the town of Norwood, where they spent 3-4 hours to get the bird before driving six hours home again.

There were inevitable misses — 17 species seen in Colorado in 2020 that Cole did not get. With each dip, the midyear promise of a possible new state record dipped, too, as many Big Year dreams do. But serendipity brought some compensation.



Cole Sage at age 11



Gyr Falcon (No. 404)
Cole Sage



Nelson's Sparrow (No. 390)
Cole Sage

Continued on page 17

A Blue-headed Vireo (No. 386) landed in a tree near the county courthouse in tiny Eads. In August, Cole “just bumped into” an early-migrating Black-throated Green Warbler (No. 377) near Prewitt Reservoir. In November, he was front-row-center for a rare Magnificent Frigatebird (No. 399) that materialized over Cherry Creek State Park, his home patch: “Getting it there was so cool!”

Cole added just five species in November and two in December. But the penultimate one had been “a true nemesis bird for me,” he said. Back on New Year’s, he had searched Fort Collins in vain for a familiar winter visitor that had eluded him more than a dozen times before. When he returned 11 months later, there it finally was, perched on a utility pole near the county dump: Gyrfalcon (No. 404).

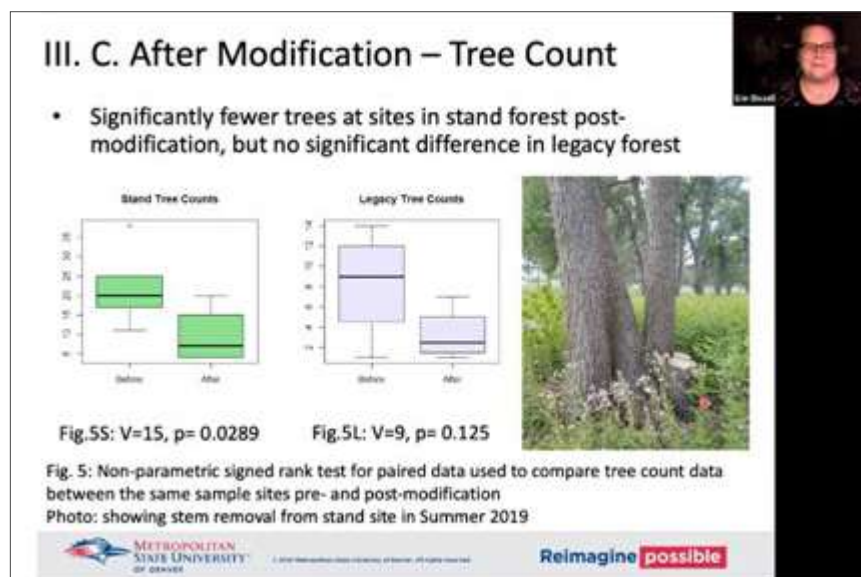
Throughout the year, Cole also found time to keep a blog, **Birds on the Wing** (<https://birdsonthewing.com>), which he started a month before 2020 and has kept up since. (In February he posted his [complete Big Year list](#) and a season-by-season narrative.) “I have thought about writing a book,” he said.

“We both are sort of in awe of Cole’s passion and the way he’s pursued it,” said Beth. “Self-taught, though he certainly has learned a lot in the field and from other birders. They have been very gracious in teaching him along the way. But it’s still sort of amazing. . . . And it was so fun. All three of us look back on this year, it was just the greatest adventure.”

In 2021, the second member of what we’ll call the “Colorado 400 Big Year Club” said he likes “being able to take a breath from the birding and not have to stay up as late or get up as early to get my schoolwork done. It has been nice to chill.”

But the passion remains. “Winter’s a little slow,” Cole Sage added, “but I’m really looking forward to spring migration this year.”

FEB PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 13*



that make up much of their waterside habitat.

Bissell’s presentation fulfilled a requirement for each recipient of a DFO Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund award: reporting back to the club either by writing an article about the project in *The Lark Bunting*, leading a field trip that incorporates its findings or field locale, or presenting an evening program.

Bissell was happy to take the latter route, in part to show off the work of her undergraduate students and the educational and career benefits they

gain from modest monetary grants like those DFO makes each year. She said a major focus in all her research is giving students experience and tools that help them find jobs after graduation. “I’m really grateful” for DFO’s grants, she said, because they are “so critical in funding these smaller research projects” that allow more undergraduate students to participate in meaningful field work.

CONSERVATION

Decision on Chico Basin Ranch lease will keep prairie ecosystem intact for birds

Roger Koester and Patrick O'Driscoll

The Colorado State Land Board has averted a potential threat to the shortgrass prairie ecosystem of Chico Basin Ranch, home to dozens of resident bird species and a vital way station for scores more species of seasonal migrants.

In a unanimous vote Feb. 10, the board commissioners chose to keep intact the 86,210-acre spread in El Paso and Pueblo counties as a single livestock and feed-crop operation when a new ranching lease takes effect in 2025. That lessens the chance of new disruption for birds and other wildlife, a worrisome possibility if the state-owned ranch were split into two or more parcels under separate leases and management.

Unknown and unresolved, however, is whether the board will also act to allow continued year-round access to the ranch for birding — an activity that benefits Chico Basin's rich avian life through birders' citizen science observations via eBird. A plan for the land board to issue and manage "layered" leases for birding and other non-agricultural uses could alter the present ranch operator's informal system of convenient, self-guided, year-round access at reasonable cost.

Although not entirely unexpected, the board decision is an important milestone in preparing for life after the present ranch lease expires on Dec. 31, 2024. Thanks to conservation organizations including Denver Field Ornithologists, a blizzard of written comments before the meeting voiced concern that breaking up such a large natural expanse could tarnish Chico Basin as one of Colorado's most valuable natural spaces for birds (346 species recorded).

At the board's meeting in January, representatives of DFO and Aiken Audubon of Colorado Springs noted that a 21,000-acre section under consideration for splitting off as a separate grazing property is habitat for the [Mountain Plover](#), a top-priority species for protection at Chico Basin. Separating it from the rest of the property would require road, fence and corral construction that could potentially degrade the species' territory.

"Let there be no doubt that legions of birders, with Aiken Audubon's leadership and strong advocacy from DFO, moved the commissioners and staff from their original leanings and toward this positive outcome for birds," said DFO vice president **Susan Blansett**, acting chair of the club's Conservation Committee.

In addition, the land board decided in February that it will put the next ranch lease out to competitive bidding. This means that Box T Partners (also known as Ranchlands), which has earned praise for its stewardship of Chico Basin since 2000, must bid against other prospective operators to keep its lease. Board staff has noted that in leasing various state-owned properties across Colorado, the board does not typically lean toward the highest bidder, but rather considers the stewardship record of the rancher along with the financial bid.

In that regard, birders who have visited Chico Basin are pulling hard for Box T Partners to win the next lease. For years, the Colorado Springs-based outfit has used a birding-friendly honor system to grant self-guided access with few rules or restrictions. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has temporarily altered usual practice, day-trip birders previously visited without need of reservations. They left their per-person fee (\$15) in a rustic pay box in the yard of ranch headquarters, much like visitors pay state park admission at kiosks if park entrance gates are unstaffed.

Box T Partners' simple, open-gate approach has allowed DFO to conduct field trips there several times a year. Chico Basin outings have regularly been the most popular that DFO offers, filling to capacity in the first days after new trip schedules are posted.

Even if Box T Partners wins the next ranching lease, the land board intends to wield direct control over non-agricultural access to Chico Basin, something the company now controls. That means a separate lease arrangement could govern how and when birders can enter after 2024. What form such a lease would take is unclear. Informal conversations suggest that one or more birding organizations might hold a lease. But no financial terms, calendar restrictions, reservation limits or other rules beyond the open, informal system now in place have been discussed.

The land board's only concession so far to continued birding after 2024 has been to place it under a "scientific research"

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CHICO BASIN *cont from page 18*

classification that won't emphasize revenue generation as a leasing priority. But any restriction of birding access by season, month or other calendar measure could prove a major sticking point. After all, Chico Basin is host not only to migrating birds but summer, winter, and year-round resident species, too.

Next up is preparation of a formal Request for Proposals, or RFP, to begin the bidding process for the next ranching lease. Still to be nailed down is how that lease will be put out and how long it will run. The board also discussed lease length extensively in February, including incentives if a lessee demonstrates excellence in running the ranch. The board directed staff to draft such language for further discussion at its April meeting, and to draft the full RFP for consideration by May.

Some commissioners have expressed concern that Colorado does not now reward conscientious lessees such as Box T Partners for the work they do to sustain and improve the state properties they manage. One potential "reward" could be a lease that runs longer than the typical 10 years — the present 25-year Chico Basin lease being unusual in that regard. Another is to grant a right under Section 118, the state regulation that governs state lands leasing, for operators who perform well to renegotiate without competition for a new lease.

In a bit of situational irony, the head of Box T Partners, **Duke Phillips III**, waived an offer of Section 118 rights back when he negotiated the current lease. At the February board meeting, Phillips described an unwritten understanding that his company would get a preferential negotiating position if it performed well. Because that was not formally written down, Box T has no right to bypass bidding and negotiate solely.

"We believe that conservation values and financial gain can be balanced," **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair for Aiken Audubon, wrote in a post to the COBirds list-serv in February. "The Phillips family has openly allowed access to birders, and has been an outstanding land steward. We'd welcome the opportunity to continue that relationship."

Blansett acknowledged "the hard work of our DFO Conservation Committee, especially **Roger Koester, Colleen Nunn, Steve Ryder** and **Sharon Tinianow**." She also thanked "every single DFO member who wrote or spoke up on behalf of Chico's birds during these many months. You have all made a huge difference and thus earned credibility for DFO with the (land board) commissioners."

CONSERVATION

Important Bird Areas: essential to avian success

Colleen Nunn

Upon first glance or hearing, the abbreviation “IBA” looks and sounds like something from the craft beer industry, doesn’t it? Maybe short for India Brown Ale? Import Beer Association?

Nah!! How about Important Bird Area? Maybe you’ve even seen a sign with those words (or the IBA abbreviation) at the trailhead of a place you go birding. I remember where I first saw one. It was at the trailhead of the [Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area](#) (founded in 1971 by DFO!) a few miles northwest of Silverthorne.

My first thought was, “Hmm, I wonder what *that* means . . .” So, I went off to find out.

Behind the signs is an international network founded in 1985 by [BirdLife International](#), which still calls them IBAs but has updated their full name to [Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas](#). Basically, this program declares a natural area “important to birds” in the hope that certifying it as such will help protect it. Certifications are not laws or regulations. Rather, they are bold statements by ornithologists and bird-lovers around the world that a particular site is essential to birds’ success. Globally, more than 13,000 terrestrial sites and 3,000 marine sites bear the IBA moniker in more than 200 countries. Here in Colorado, there are [57 IBAs](#) covering more than 1.4 million acres of habitat — 54 of “state” importance or priority and three with “global” priority. More about those below, but first . . .

BirdLife International has built the IBA program globally upon the earlier work of the International Committee for Bird Preservation, begun in England in 1922 to work for the safety of migrating species. Today, it defines its mission as “a global partnership of conservation organizations . . . that strive to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.”

BirdLife, with headquarters in Cambridge, UK, has about 120 partner organizations and has a sizable staff of 8,000. It’s

interesting to peruse “Datazone” on the BirdLife website (<http://www.birdlife.org/>) to see where all the IBAs are located.

In the U.S., the National Audubon Society is BirdLife International’s partner. **Alison Holloran** of Fort Collins, Audubon’s national vice president and the executive director of Audubon Rockies, got the American IBA program “off the ground” in 1995. It now includes 645 IBA sites, more than half the 1,200 total in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

After grounding me in a few IBA basics, Alison referred me to **Zach Hutchinson**, community science coordinator for Audubon Rockies. He manages the IBA nomination and evaluation process for the Audubon Rocky Mountain Region, which includes Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. “Colorado just added three more sites,” he said, “which brings the total to 57.”

Many IBAs are on public lands, but private sites are also eligible if they meet rigorous standards. Persons or groups who nominate places must fill out a robust nomination form, answering questions that include:

- Does the site “regularly have significant numbers” of an endangered, threatened, vulnerable or declining species?
- Are significant numbers of “species of high conservation priority” also there regularly?
- Does it host significant numbers of birds in breeding season, winter, or migration?
- Is the location important for long-term research or monitoring projects that “contribute substantially” to bird science, conservation and education?
- What land uses are now on-site, and are there threats to the location?

Check the Colorado page, and you’ll see quite a few places where we often go birding (<https://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/state/colorado>). Among Colorado’s nearly five dozen IBAs, the list includes Chatfield and Barr Lake state parks, the lakes in Denver City Park, Dinosaur Ridge, Bear Creek Valley, South Platte Park and the South Platte River Corridor, Rocky Mountain Arsenal and Arapaho national

Continued on page 21



wildlife refuges, Fountain Creek Regional Park, Pueblo Reservoir and Jackson Lake state parks, John Martin Reservoir State Wildlife Area, Rocky Mountain National Park and Colorado National Monument. The three Colorado sites with “global” priority include Pawnee and Comanche national grasslands and the Gunnison Basin watershed.

I was surprised to find that Cherry Creek State Park has never been nominated. Perhaps once the DFO Conservation Committee reads up on the criteria for IBA recognition, this omission will make more sense. If not, however, the committee might nominate it for inclusion.

And so might *you* nominate one, too, if you consider the IBA potential of your favorite birding areas. If you're inclined, review the criteria and see how your spot measures up. As I mentioned above, three new IBAs in Colorado have just been added, and Audubon is open to your suggestions. If this subject stirs your analytical impulses, contact the Conservation Committee (email me at colleen.nunn@ecentral.com). If we're moving ahead with a nomination, we can always use your interest and help.

Taking (a tax) advantage of 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of monthly tips from the DFO Finance Committee about tax-saving ways to contribute to Denver Field Ornithologists.

Roger Koester and Sue Summers

Doing good *and* helping your bottom line is easy in 2021.

In the year-end coronavirus relief package signed into law on December 27, 2020, Congress has given you an easy way to support a charitable organization such as DFO and take a tax deduction for it. You may recall that in the 2020 CARES Act (short for Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act), Congress included a provision for \$300 above-the-line tax deductions (meaning, taken straight out of gross income on the income tax Form 1040) for charitable gifts. The recent relief package not only continues this provision, but also enhances it for 2021.

For 2021, individuals can claim a deduction from gross income of up to \$300 (and now up to \$600 if you file jointly) for a cash donation to a qualifying charitable organization such as DFO. “Cash donations” include not only cash, but also checks as well as donations made using credit or debit cards. For 2020, the limit on deductions was \$300 whether you filed taxes individually or jointly, so the change for 2021 can give you up to double the benefit if you file your 2021 tax return jointly next year.

The personal benefit of these donations is that they will reduce your taxable income even if you don't itemize your tax deductions. That's because in 2018, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act went into effect. While it nearly doubled the standard deduction, it also made it more difficult for many people to qualify to itemize their tax deductions. Therefore, donations to charitable organizations became, for many people, a “feel-good” action without having an actual tax benefit. Now, you can both feel good and enjoy a tax break!

If you decide to donate to DFO, you can designate your gift in two ways: to the Research Grants fund that supports scientific and educational projects about birds and their habitat, or to the Friends of DFO fund, which supports the club's annual operations. Either way, you can make your gift in memory of someone or to honor a living individual. Simply go to the “Support DFO” section on the main menu of the website (<https://dfobirds.org>) to get started.

As always, be sure to ask if your employer matches charitable gifts. This can greatly enhance the value of your gift, and provide even more benefit to DFO. Also, as we discussed in our previous article, don't forget that in retirement, you can designate all or part of a required distribution from your IRA to go directly to DFO, which qualifies as a reduction to the taxable portion of that distribution. (See that article in the February-March issue of the newsletter in *The Lark Bunting* archive at: <https://dfobirds.org/News/LBArchives.aspx>)

As with all tax topics, be sure to consult your tax or investment adviser if you have any questions about these tax benefits.



Bald Eagle
Jim Esten



Harris's Sparrow
Patrick O'Driscoll



Van Peurse and dowitchers

PANDEMIC BIRDING

One year later, DFO'ers on Covid shutdown: We miss field trips — but we're still birding

Patrick O'Driscoll

Most anniversaries are cause for celebration, but the one that marks a year since the coronavirus pandemic slapped us in the face is not one of them. Yes, that March 2020 anniversary is upon us right now.

Has it really been a year? Feels more like five. Nobody knew it at the time, but on the morning of Sunday, March 8, 2020, I led the last DFO field trip of 2020 with 11 other birders along Cherry Creek State Park's "Wetlands Loop."

In-person field trips: Remember those? That trip was supposed to revive the monthly DFO outing that **Karen von Saltza** used to lead in the park every second Sunday. It was DFO's third trip that month, with 11 more scheduled to follow.

But days later, the DFO Board voted via email to cancel all trips through April 2020. The Cancellations were extended, again and again, into 2021 and the present. In the 12 months since the first cancellation, DFO members have more than coped. What else would birders do? We regained our footing and birded on — just not elbow-to-elbow on group outings, with strangers or without masks.

We recently asked readers on DFO's Facebook page to tell us about how birding went for them this first Covid Year. Here are some of their answers, including a few photos. Though we won't celebrate this anniversary, let's celebrate each other as we prepare to reunite sometime soon on the birding trail again.

.....

Although I bird mostly alone, I do on occasion meet one or two other birders at a location and we bird together but "apart." It has kept my enthusiasm for birding alive and allowed me to share observations. We have encountered small groups of masked birders in our travels. I have gotten a few "lifers" in the year of the pandemic. Birders have been sharing much information on social media, and that, too, has kept the spark alive.

— **Karen Drozda**, Denver

Birdwatching all by myself made it more challenging for me, but I got to polish my skill and knowledge a lot. But I miss the DFO field trips.

— **Joe Chen**, Denver

Continued on page 23



Cottonwood Creek on last field trip of 2020
Patrick O'Driscoll

PANDEMIC BIRDING *cont from page 22*

It hasn't been a change for me because I've never done a field trip before . . . e-Bird, a few Colorado birding Facebook Forums and the DFO FB page have been very helpful in locating new species. I took my selfie on October 26 at the Prairie Loop at Cherry Creek State Park. I had been searching to add Long-billed Dowitcher to my life list when I met another birder in the park who led me to a different area to look for shorebirds. We noticed a few, including a Black-bellied Plover lifer for him. Then, as we walked down a small trail toward the shore, NINE dowitchers flew RIGHT in front of me!! I took the selfie because I was so shocked!

— **Denise Van Peurse**, Evergreen

Things weren't very different for me because more often than not, I go birding by myself. I'm always on the lookout for birds who require a portrait from me, and I like to go at my own pace. A recent favorite trip was to Eleven Mile Canyon near Woodland Park, where I got the Bald Eagle shot.

— **Jim Esten**, Denver

When Covid's restrictions stopped international travel, we became immersed in any wildlife experience Colorado had to offer. We have been birding more than ever, discovering Colorado hotspots we find on DFO, CFO and eBird. On January 29, my husband and I were on the observation boardwalk at Barr Lake State Park, where thousands of Canada Geese blanketed the lake. The sound was deafening! There were five Bald Eagles on the ice just waiting for the right moment. At the faintest movement of an eagle, the geese would swarm up and move en masse. It was mesmerizing.

— **Meg Kenny**, Denver

I've been sharing the joy of birding with a group of friends that are new birders. We go out weekly, stay 6 feet apart and wear masks. It's a great way to enjoy the outdoors and safely socialize.

— **Barbara Masoner**, Denver

It seems I birded more in 2020 than any other year. I had just begun monitoring a Great Blue Heron colony in Parker for the DFO Waterbirds Project when the Covid-19 restrictions shut down access in March. So my husband and I began daily walks to Cherry Creek SP, keeping our own "Pandemic Bird List" at the perfect time of year: spring migration. In June I began weekly bird walks with three other women, obeying all the rules for separate cars, masks, social distance and local birding. In midsummer, we went into the foothills to escape the heat and bird county open space sites. On one of our best days, we saw and heard Ovenbird and 27 other species at Gateway Mesa Douglas County Open Space. Birding was great for getting us outdoors and keeping us sane.

— **Mary Cay Burger**, Englewood

I've missed leading field trips this Covid year. Although I have birded with one or two others a handful of times (masked up and 6 feet apart), I've encountered birder mobs in the field chasing some rarities. Being retired, I could have gone somewhere new every day, but my backyard was a surprise. Just two doors down the alley from busy East Colfax, an immature Harris's Sparrow wandered into my yard two days before Thanksgiving. It still visits more than three months later, a handsome little silver lining for an otherwise lost year.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, Denver



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

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Phone (optional) _____

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THE LARK BUNTING

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DFOBIRDS.ORG

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With another spring,
fresh beginnings for DFO

DFO ELECTION

Who's running for office?
Here are the candidates
for April vote

BIRDING ESSAY

Nighthawks: Don't blink,
or you may miss them

STATE WILDLIFE AREAS

Colorado creates new
non-hunter/fisher permit
for wildlife preserves

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Golden-winged Warbler

📷 Rob Raker
📍 Tucker Gulch
Golden, Jefferson Co.





FROM THE PRESIDENT

With another spring, fresh beginnings for DFO

Dave Hill

Birdie-birdie, everyone!

At the end of April, my term as president of Denver Field Ornithologists ends. From April 13 through 27, DFO members will vote for new leaders to guide our stellar birding organization. As we begin this transition in club leadership, I am proud of how DFO has dealt with our recent challenges and is looking forward.

First, I thank YOU, our membership, for your sustained support and understanding as we have survived as a club through more than a year with the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the upheavals, a year of canceled field trips and other adjustments we had to make, membership remains steady. In fact, DFO has just surpassed the 500-member mark again! Losing many dozens of field trips to the Covid shutdown was a major blow. Yet you continue to support DFO and look forward to the return of our popular group outings very soon.

Thanks to Zoom online technology, we have hung together in amazing ways. In the past year, we have enjoyed together, virtually, more evening presentations than DFO ever held in person before. We also developed virtual field trips to share birding experiences “together apart” in a Covid-safe way. Our DFO workshop team is preparing a birding skills webinar on birding by ear later this month. (*See the related article on page 11 of this newsletter.*)

And all along, our superb newsletter *The Lark Bunting* and our social media platforms have continued to keep everyone informed.

As I mentioned above, we now see field trips on the horizon. The Field Trip Committee has recommended, and the DFO Board has approved, a return to group outings. First we must finish updating DFO's liability waiver for field trips to include necessary new language and an electronic signature feature to

enhance its legal sturdiness. Once that's in place, spring trips will be posted again on our website for registration and we will keep our membership informed via email.

Until the pandemic is behind us, DFO group outings will include prudent limits that follow state and local health guidelines: Six participants maximum, continued mask-wearing and social distancing, and no carpooling except for members of the same household.

After a year without DFO's annual Spring and Fall Bird Counts, we plan both this year. We'll conduct our Spring Bird Count on May 7, 8 and 9 at the usual locations: Barr Lake, Castlewood Canyon, Chatfield and Cherry Creek state parks, Lower Bear Creek, Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, and the Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield. Many of the count areas have subdivided into sections that can be surveyed in groups of two. Once we have posted all these count locations as field trips on the DFO website, we'll let you know so you can go there to sign up.

In addition, DFO's annual membership picnic, canceled last summer, is now planned for this fall when we anticipate it will be safer to gather outdoors in larger numbers.

As you can see, with spring's arrival, a freshening of DFO is at hand. Congratulations to all for getting through the worst of a pandemic year-plus and looking forward to normal.

I have found working for DFO a tremendously rewarding experience, largely due to your enthusiasm, dedication, and support. I have grown considerably and have learned much these past two years. Thank you all for having given me the privilege of leading Colorado's premier birding organization.

Cheers and chirps,

— Dave



Go Birding in Bad (aka *the Right*) Weather

Bryan Guarente
Monday, April 19, 2021
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

DFO's monthly program for April — the club's last regularly scheduled program until fall — features a Colorado birder and weather expert familiar to readers of the COBirds list-serv whenever major weather, especially in spring, sets up over our region as migrating birds make their way through the state.

Bryan Guarente, who trains meteorologists at Boulder's UCAR, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, has extended his work to help the birding community understand the relationship between weather and bird migration. As 2021's spring migration arrives, join him on Monday, April 19 in a program co-sponsored by the Denver Public Library.

Guarente will focus on those unexpected “fallout” birds we sometimes see because they were forced down by inclement spring weather. “Let's take a look at some of those vagrant spring migrants,” he says, “and see how the weather tells us their intriguing migration story.”

Guarente notes that spring migrants grounded by weather “got here on the power of their own wings, fat reserves, hormones, and no doubt with the help of the wind.” Their relationship with the wind is “awe-inspiring,” he adds, and birds’ “physiological evolution from this relationship helps (them) soar effortlessly while covering significant distances or floating just above the water surface.” Some of the smallest migrants fly hundreds of miles in a single night to cross the Gulf of Mexico when the wind is right. That crossing can take 12-24 hours.

The relationship with wind also can be disastrous. If weather changes during their arduous journey, they may be “downed and suffering” after using up the fat reserves they built up before departing. The fallout birds we see in Colorado are the lucky ones, Guarente says — they managed to reach land and not fall out over the open ocean. Off-course but alive, they linger long enough to rest and refuel — and be seen by alert birders — before pushing on to their destinations.

Guarente grew up birding with his father in southeastern Pennsylvania. Hobby and science first crossed paths in his life during his undergraduate studies in meteorology at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. The real convergence, however, was in graduate school at the University of Illinois, where observing nocturnal spring migrants riding low-level winds helped solidify the connection. A highlight, as well as an epiphany, was when he found 27 species of warbler in one day in a postage stamp-sized park along a stationary weather front.

After graduate school, Guarente returned to Colorado, where he now trains meteorologists on all things forecasting, both national and international, at UCAR.

A reminder about the date of this program. DFO monthly presentations usually are on the fourth Monday evening. But this one will be a week earlier, the third Monday of April, because of a scheduling conflict.

To register for this program, go to this Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_HeHO97XPTFKDSWFp-_3RtA
You will receive email reminders with link to the webinar before the program date.

More evening programs? Send us your ideas

Bill Turner

With meteorologist and birder **Bryan Guarente's** April 19 presentation on birding in bad weather, Denver Field Ornithologists will reach the end of the 2020-21 season of monthly evening programs. After a summer break, DFO's regular fourth-Monday presentations will return again in late August.

As DFO's monthly program manager, I welcome your suggestions for speakers and topics you would like to see at future evening meetings. A silver lining to the tragedy of the Covid-19 pandemic is that we learned to use the Zoom platform to broadcast our monthly programs virtually as webinars. This has allowed us to engage speakers from anywhere in the world, without having to bear the considerably higher cost and more complicated logistics of bringing them to Denver in person.

In the past year, we seized that advantage to feature several top-notch voices in the world of birds and birding. Last September, author, guide and expert birder **Kenn Kaufman** came to us live from his home in Ohio. In November, author, poet and African-American conservation activist **Drew Lanham** did the same from South Carolina. And this spring, hummingbird authority and field guide author **Sheri Williamson** Zoomed to us from southeast Arizona. They all did so to enthusiastic audiences two, three, even four times the size of our largest in-person gatherings before the pandemic.

Being able to hear, in the comfort of your home, from favorite experts you have read or perhaps seen and heard in person elsewhere, is one of the few delights of this long season of social isolation. DFO will continue this practice of delivering monthly programs via Zoom at least through the upcoming fall season, giving you the opportunity to ask questions of the speakers from your computer as we watch and listen.

We look forward to your ideas for future programs on topics that can range from conservation and education to field and lab research, travel, history and legislative issues. Keep in mind DFO's broad mission "to promote interest in the study and preservation of birds and their habitats."

I invite you to give it some thought now and share your ideas with me soon via email. If you happen to have contact information and more about a suggested speaker, include that, too. My email address is toursbyturner@aol.com. Thank you in advance, and good birding to everyone this spring and summer. See you again when we gather in fall for more evening programs.

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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Everything you wanted to know about hummingbirds — and then some

Patrick O'Driscoll

AN-thro-po-MOR-phism — Noun: the attributing of human characteristics or behavior to an animal

It was hard not to reverse anthropomorphize a bit during hummingbird expert **Sheri Williamson's** presentation for Denver Field Ornithologists' monthly evening program on March 22. As I watched and listened, I couldn't help attributing *hummingbird* behavior to the very *human* Williamson herself.

For more than an hour, she buzzed, darted, danced, flitted and hummed excitedly through an exhaustive and entertaining recitation of how one of "the smallest warm-blooded creatures on Earth" amazes us humans. Her nonstop, hummingbird-esque chatter was no nectar-juiced sugar high. Williamson, a field researcher who helps band 500-600 hummingbirds a year, just loves the tiny creatures so much that she has become expert in every aspect of them. She lavished that expertise on more than 200 attendees to her Zoom lecture, "Hummingbirds: Small Wonders," co-sponsored with DFO by the Denver Public Library.

A lifelong naturalist, birder and conservationist, Williamson is co-founder and director/naturalist of the [Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory](#). She literally wrote the book on hummingbirds, published 19 years ago in the Peterson Field Guides Series. She just finished extensively revising it (including bigger, brighter color plates); the long-awaited second edition of *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America* is due for release by the end of this year.

View the complete video of "Hummingbirds: Small Wonders" in DFO's "Past Programs" archive:
<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

To be fair, Williamson is too friendly and all-around nice to compare to hummingbirds beyond her tireless and intense enthusiasm for them. If you think these tiny, colorful, flying dynamos are as sweet as they look, she has four words for you: "They are savage beasts!" She said this while flashing on the Zoom screen an image of a juvenile male Anna's Hummingbird on top of an adult it had dragged down to the ground.

Anyone with backyard hummingbird feeders has seen them "screaming and squawking and body slamming each other," Williamson added. "It's just part of their nature to be little junkyard dogs." Actually, it's an anatomical and biological necessity. Hummingbird metabolism is so high that they must constantly feed to keep going. The smallest ones, light as dimes or pennies, burn calories at 10 times the rate of Mourning Doves and 100 times that of elephants.

"When you live within hours of starvation pretty much every day of your life, you can't afford to share," she said. "There is no word for 'share' in the hummingbird's vocabulary." There might be a truce when bad weather or peak migration leaves everyone "really desperate to feed, but mostly it's just a free-for-all," she added.

Hyper-aggression aside, hummingbirds "truly are miniaturized marvels," Williamson said. In just 65 minutes, she covered the spectrum — hummingbird anatomy, size, range, hybridization, evolution, diet and food sources, nesting, coloration, song,

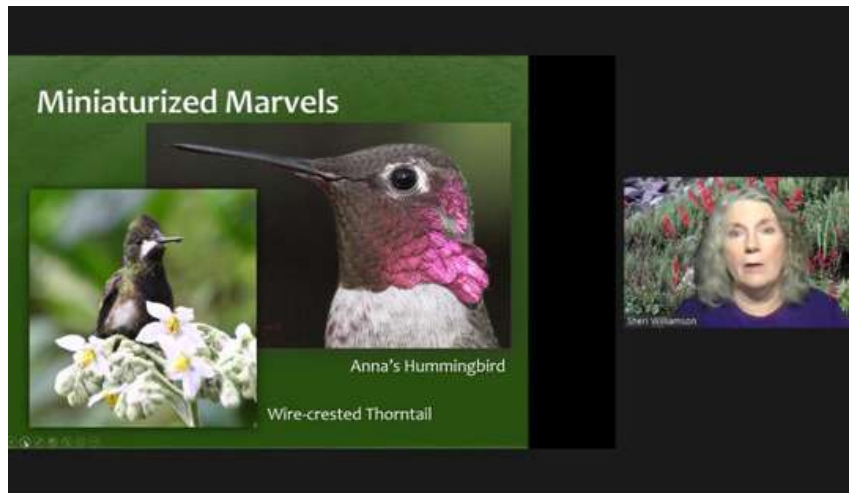
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migration, predators, climate change threats, even feeder hygiene. Here are some of the can-you-top-this factoids she dropped along the way:

- Hummingbird brains are larger, in proportion to their bodies, than those of humans: “They are incredibly smart little birds. ‘Bird brain’ is truly a compliment”
- With more than 350 species, they are Earth’s second-largest avian family after flycatchers. All are in the Americas, though hummingbirds originated in Europe more than 40 million years ago. They flourished and died there, but not before some made it to South America 22 million years ago. Most today are there and in Central America and Mexico. About 20 species have been found in the continental U.S. and Canada, and the 11 to 13 seen in Colorado are the most for an inland state
- Despite their size, hummingbirds make “mind-boggling” migratory journeys. One juvenile female Rufous Hummingbird flew 3,500 miles on her first-ever migration, ending up in Tallahassee, FL, where she was banded, then rediscovered back in Alaska the next year
- The magical iridescence and color change of male hummingbirds’ throats is the work of tiny bits of melanin pigments in their feathers. Williamson said the particles refract and reflect light, and the birds can cock or angle their heads to flash different colors to attract mates or challenge rivals
- In proportion to size, hummingbirds can fly faster than the Space Shuttle (350 body lengths per second), with elaborate diving and swooping courtship displays reaching 60 mph closer to the ground
- The ancient Aztecs believed warriors who died in battle and women who died in childbirth became hummingbird bodyguards in the afterlife for **Huitzilopochtli** (“Hummingbird of the South”), the Aztec god of war and of the sun: “It really tickles me thinking of these ferocious little jewel-like birds guiding the god of war through the dangerous and devilish underworld at night!”

When the topic is hummingbirds, “I do get wound up,” Williamson warned her audience at the outset. Hummingbirds “have literally taken over my life. I could talk about them for hours and hours and hours.”

No doubt she would have had she not committed to keep her information-packed presentation at 60 minutes-plus. After a laughter-filled Q-&-A session, DFO President **Dave Hill** thanked Williamson with a compliment: “I’d like you to continue for another hour.” Still laughing, she replied, “Be careful what you wish for!”



From DFO research grantees, Zoom-goers get the straight poop — and the plumage

Patrick O'Driscoll

Five species of small songbirds — three kinds of redpolls from across the globe and two kinds of chickadees in and around Boulder — took center stage via Zoom on March 8. With about 100 attendees listening in, two recipients of 2020 research grants from Denver Field Ornithologists gave live progress updates on their avian research projects.

The presenters, both students at the University of Colorado Boulder, were fulfilling a commitment asked of all awardees of DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund grants. In exchange for DFO's dollars, recipients agree to report back to the club about their research in any of three ways: leading a field trip related to the project, writing an article about it in the DFO newsletter, or giving an oral presentation.

Undergraduate student **Cori Carver** and graduate researcher **Erik Funk** both chose the latter and agreed to present at the same special DFO program, "From Redpoll Plumage to Chickadee Poop: Insights into Avian Evolution," co-sponsored by the Denver Public Library. Each was introduced by assistant Prof. **Scott Taylor**, whose Taylor Lab directs student work on a number of avian research projects at CU.

View the complete video of "From Redpoll Plumage to Chickadee Poop: Insights into Avian Evolution and Ecology" in DFO's "Past Programs" archive:
<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

Carver's subject is what effect the changing urban landscape — replacement of native Front Range tree species with non-native ornamentals and other alien varieties — may have on the insect-rich diet of baby Black-capped and Mountain chickadees and their subsequent ability to fledge from the nest. "Humans are changing the natural environment around them at an unprecedented rate," she said.

Carver explained that for thousands of years, local chickadees relied on native insects and bugs "tightly related through long evolutionary history" to native trees. Replacement by non-natives, which can only support a narrow selection of predatory and generic bugs, forces native insects "to migrate (away) . . . or go extinct." This in turn challenges "the backyard birds we have all come to love" when they gather insects to feed their young after hatching. Will the changing array of foods affect success in fledging chicks into future adult birds?

Carver has reached no conclusions yet, but her work is part of the broader Boulder Chickadee Study exploring various aspects of these birds' lives. This ongoing, long-term project is conducted by CU students on the Boulder campus at 5,300 feet elevation, the Sugarloaf Road research site in the foothills at 8,000 feet, and the CU Boulder Mountain Research Station between Ward and Nederland at 9,500 feet and above. Around each site, more than 100 nest boxes host the chickadees that Carver and others study.

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There, Carver surveyed the insects that chickadees collect. To find out what their nestlings actually ate, she “opportunistically collect(ed) fecal samples from them.” Translation: the chicks usually poop when handled during capture and banding, but Carver also used swabs to gather further samples. DNA from the bird poop was then analyzed in the lab to determine what caterpillars, flies, spiders, “true bugs” and other insect groups now make up chickadee diets in Front Range habitat altered by urbanizing development.

DNA, too, is the focus of Funk’s laboratory research on redpoll finches. His DFO grant has helped him study the genetic underpinnings of subtly different coloration and other traits in the three kinds of redpolls — Lesser, Common, and Hoary. His chromosomal explorations aimed to further examine whether redpolls are truly three different species, or just one (or maybe two) with interesting variations in appearance.

Nomadic and widely distributed across the Arctic and other points north of us, redpolls are notorious for presenting identification challenges and a long history of taxonomic debate. “They are a difficult group to understand,” Funk told his DFO audience. But he said his research in clusters of genetic variation shared by the three kinds of redpoll supports the single-species view — that they vary only in look, not their core genetic makeup.

The differing chromosomal markers Funk tracked and isolated govern plumage and bill characteristics: the amount of red in the birds’ caps and breast feathers, the degree and shade of brown streaking on their flanks, and the size and shape of their bills — smaller and pointy in Hoary and more stout and conical in Lesser and Common. “The genetic signatures indicate gene flow between Hoary, Common and Lesser redpolls is frequent,” he said — meaning, interbreeding and mixing of genetic material is common among what were assumed to be different species until advances in DNA study and sequencing technology.

To see if this is repeated in other similar species, Funk also studied crossbill and rosy-finch data. Both species lack the chromosomal inversion he found in the redpolls. The two groups of species do not interbreed among themselves wherever they occur together like the redpolls do. Redpolls, he concluded, “are behaving more like a single species rather than three.”

Welcome to new DFO members

Karen Axe of Lafayette; Bev Baker, Louisville; Sarah Franklin, Aurora; Georgia Garnsey, Denver; Cynthia Grover, Fruita; Larry Horowitz, Denver; Kristin Joy, Loveland; Barbara Masoner, Denver; Robert and Wendy Miles, Aurora; Carmencita and Dean Shoup, Aurora; Kenna Sue Trickey, Denver; Hobza/White Family and Kathryn White, Denver; Rob Wilson, Highlands Ranch, and Qi Zhou, Perth, Australia

Thank you for your contributions

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Jeannette Auman; Jill Boice; Barbara Masoner; Tim Patnode, and Hobza/White Family and Kathryn White

Friends of DFO (general fund)

Jennifer and Charles Thornton-Kolbe; Hobza/White Family and Kathryn White, and Rob and Michele Worrall

Who's running for DFO office? Here are the candidates for April vote

Bea Weaver

DFO members will go to the polls virtually beginning April 13 to elect officers and board members for our club. As outlined in last month's issue of *The Lark Bunting*, members will vote for DFO president, vice president, secretary and treasurer (each serves a 1-year term and can run for re-election) and several members of the DFO Board of Directors (each serves a 3-year term and also can run again).

Online voting via Survey Monkey — an internet balloting app that automatically tallies the results — begins on **Tuesday, April 13** and runs for two weeks, through **Tuesday, April 27**. All DFO members will receive an email with voting instructions. (*Anyone without computer access may cast ballots by telephone; see how at bottom of this story.*) Ballots will be counted after April 27 and the election results announced via email to all DFO members.

Here are the candidates and background information about them.

Candidate for DFO President



Susan Blansett

Susan Blansett is completing two years as DFO vice president. She joined the DFO Board in 2016 and has served in numerous other club roles, including Nominating Committee chair, interim chair of the Conservation Committee, and as a member of the Communications & Outreach Committee. She also organized two board retreats and surveys of members on topics of importance to DFO membership. Susan is a professional fundraising consultant in economic development.

Candidate for DFO Vice President



Sharon Tinianow

A DFO board member and chair of the Communications & Outreach Committee, Sharon Tinianow (*Tin-YAH-noh*), was previously the editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She also serves on the Conservation Committee. Sharon began birding when she took an ornithology course as an undergraduate student at Kent State University in Ohio. She moved to Denver in 2012 and is special projects manager at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History.

Candidate for DFO Secretary



Peter Stolz

Peter Stolz is a physicist by profession and an active member of the board. He is running for re-election as DFO secretary. Besides his official duty as recorder of board minutes for the club's governance, history and archives, Peter has also been invaluable since 2020 as a DFO Zoom host and facilitator of monthly online presentations and quarterly board meetings in the absence of in-person gatherings because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Candidate for DFO Treasurer



Sue Summers

Sue Summers, who is running for re-election, was born and raised in the Seattle area, where she first became a birder. She joined DFO soon after moving to Colorado seven years ago. With a career in financial services, she has served as DFO treasurer for five years and has enjoyed being on the DFO board and meeting many members. She looks forward to continuing her service.

Candidates for DFO Board of Directors

Note: Of the four candidates, three are current board members running for re-election



Karen Drozda

A board member since 2018, Karen Drozda is a professional in the medical field, a dedicated birder for 20 years, and chair of DFO's Better Birding Skills Committee. She has been responsible for several successful birding workshops and has scheduled more for this year, including her own on birdsong identification. A DFO field trip leader, Karen looks forward to leading many more trips once the Covid-19 pandemic subsides. Her favorite birding spot is Eldorado Canyon State Park, especially during migration.



Patrick O'Driscoll

A board member since 2017 and editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter since early 2020, Patrick O'Driscoll is a retired newspaper journalist. A 32-year resident of Denver, he birded casually before taking it up seriously in 2013 and joining DFO a year later. He became a field trip leader in 2016 and has served on both the Field Trip and Communications & Outreach committees for several years. He also coordinates DFO's Colonial Waterbirds citizen-science project, now in its fifth year.



Steve Ryder

Steve Ryder is a past Conservation Committee chair, present member of the committee, and this spring returns to chairing the committee again. He holds a doctorate in environmental politics and policy and has worked many years in land conservation. He works for the Colorado Department of Agriculture on projects pertaining to invasive plants in the agricultural community.



Elaine Wagner

A board member since 2020, Elaine Wagner is a retired pathologist from Littleton Adventist Hospital. She recently became chair of DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grants Committee, which just announced a list of six funding recipients for 2021. An avid birder (348 Colorado species in 2020, 11th most on the state eBird list), Elaine has actively participated in DFO field trips and seasonal bird counts. Her first international birding trip was to Hungary. She also enjoys hiking and birding presentations on Zoom.

Not up for re-election this year are these DFO board members, whose 3-year terms expire in the year indicated:

Bea Weaver (2022), **Mary Cay Burger** (2023), **Roger Koester** (2023) and **Bill Turner** (2023)

Members without access to a computer can vote by telephone. Contact DFO Nominating Committee chair **Bea Weaver** at 303-999-0689 or 305-498-5935 between April 13 and April 27 to cast your ballot.

Hearing Is ID'ing: Concepts in Learning Birdsong

A DFO Better Birding Skills workshop

Tuesday, April 20, 2021 | 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Do you have trouble (or no clue!) identifying by ear the calls or songs of birds you hear but can't see? Then this DFO workshop is for you. What's more, it's FREE and available from anywhere via Zoom.

"Concepts in Learning Birdsong" with DFO field trip leader **Karen Drozda** is designed for every birder with ears, from amateurs and beginners to the most seasoned. Learn how you can increase your ability to pick out and identify bird songs and calls to a higher level — without relying on mnemonic memory tricks or those audio recordings where the voice of a polite gentleman announces the name of the bird you just heard.

This workshop provides tools and thought-provoking new (but actually age-old) skills to learn, recall and retain bird songs — to connect what you are hearing with what you are seeing. This presentation will be live on Zoom with participants able to engage in a discussion at the end of the instructor's presentation. After the session, participants will take what they've learned into the field, including a worksheet to log their results for group discussion at a second, follow-up Zoom meeting several weeks later.

Registration for the workshop is open first to current DFO members through April 15 and then to others thereafter. To register, go to this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0pd-GuqzosEtAPeikJTPOigbXJRseMY6Gj> You'll receive instructions in follow-up emails for connecting to the Zoom session.



ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Karen Drozda of Denver is a master birder with 20 years' experience in the field. With a degree in music (orchestral emphasis) and years as a cellist, she applies her music skills to birdsong instruction. While learning birdsong herself, she created her own birding vocabulary. She also leads numerous DFO field trips, is chair of the club's Better Birding Skills Committee and is a member of the DFO Board of Directors.



Common Nighthawk
Jim Esten

BIRDING ESSAY

Nighthawks: Don't blink, or you may miss them

Jared Del Rosso

In late May, just as spring migration seems to slow — look up, for it's time to welcome Common Nighthawks back to Denver.

They tend to arrive around the fourth week of May, single birds giving way to pairs, then trios, then small flocks. Most of them are clearly migrating. Their flight is northward and direct, lacking the fluttery flourishes of nighthawks feeding on the wing. Then, in mid-

June, the passage ends. Unless you are actively seeking them, you may not see another nighthawk for three months, when their southward migration peaks in mid-September.

Last spring, I sought signs of nighthawks outside their migratory seasons. I wanted to find evidence of them nesting in Centennial, the southern suburb of Denver where I live. I detailed my effort in the following essay, which was originally published last November on the Center for Humans and Nature's *City Creatures Blog*, a storytelling community at humansandnature.org.

The story leaves off in mid-June, when the nighthawks themselves left me for a time. Missing from the essay, then, were my encounters with terrific flocks of the bird in late summer, near the end and just after their typical breeding cycle. Night after night, in Centennial and Greenwood Village, 15, 20, sometimes up to 40 nighthawks gathered to feed over buggy intersections, strip malls, and parks.

Were these metro-area breeders, sharing the most productive hunting grounds? Were they more northern birds, already moving south? Or were they birds from throughout the state, seeking refuge from last summer's fires and drought in the well-irrigated suburbs of Denver? I do not know. But I was grateful for the chance to share a season or so with nighthawks, the trajectories of our lives having crossed for a time.

DFO member **Jared Del Rosso** is a contributor to the **Center for Humans and Nature**.

This essay, first published in November 2020 on the Center's *City Creatures Blog*, a storytelling community at humansandnature.org, is reprinted with thanks to the Center.

The Nighthawk's Trajectory

Jared Del Rosso

I'm an agnostic in all things but nighthawks, for with the bullbat I hold this belief: one cannot pursue the bird directly; rather, one can only seek a trajectory that may someday cross theirs.

My faith in the bird was born amid their southward migration through Denver, Colorado, in September 2015. I'd gone looking for nighthawks in a place where and at a time when I thought it

Continued on page 13

likely I might see one. Common Nighthawks are (mostly) crepuscular; they hunt for flying insects through dawn and dusk. Walking around central Denver's Cheesman Park after sunset, eyes aimed upward, I found only brown bats. I sat a while, awaiting night, and watched these other things with wings. Then, I left.

In truth, I just readied to leave. I sat in my car and, though it was a Sunday and though it was evening, I compulsively checked my email. A (lengthy) message from my department chair at the University of Denver greeted me. Compulsively, I read it, though I believe one should neither mix time off with work nor birds with the same. Dusk gave way to night. The bats gave way to a still park.

At the end of the email, nighthawks.

A trio, emerging from the nearby neighborhood, furiously pursued insects under the park's streetlights. I left my car and followed them. Nighthawks, like swallows, feed on the wing, catching insects as they fly. They are strong, agile fliers. I have seen them cut upward, leaning backward as they do, in pursuit of prey. They make micro-adjustments that give them a "tipsy" appearance, as Pete Dunne puts it in his *Field Guide Companion*. To me, they appear confident in the air. Untouchable, even. Nighthawks always seem to be beyond their human-observer, even when approaching them — a twist of angles always cutting away. Unlike songbirds, which rarely fly directly at people, this trio chased their prey wherever it went, even if it meant flying directly at me. An arm's length away, a nighthawk.

One can only seek a trajectory that may someday cross the trajectory of a nighthawk. I spent this past summer seeking just that. I let my dogs lead me. I indulged every detour and delay. We

turned home when they wanted to. We inspected dead ends. We doubled back on trails. We lingered when the dogs wanted to linger. We sat together in fields and on curbs. I suppressed my better judgment of where and when the birds would appear. By maintaining the appearance of not seeking nighthawks, I hoped I could fool serendipity into delivering them.

I did so to try to document the bird's presence in Centennial, a southern suburb of Denver, during the bird's nesting season. A mid-June sighting gave me hope. My dogs and I sought the birds above a buggy marsh at a local open space. The setting sun inspired the complex chorus of catbirds, blackbirds, and sparrows. But I missed a simpler sound: the buzz of the bird I sought, the distinct, nasal "peent" of a nighthawk. As dusk deepened, my dogs decided it was time to head back to our car. (One dog is afraid of the dark and what it means in Colorado: wild canids. The other is simply not much for walking.) I obliged, though I wanted to keep seeking.

Nearer to the car, the dogs changed their minds, insisting I let them chase each other around me. Though leashed, the dogs sprinted circles. To keep myself from their tangle, I spun with them. Once, twice, then — and only because the dogs had chosen when to turn back and when to stop for play and when to turn me in the right direction — a nighthawk.

I seek the nighthawk's trajectory because I measure the world by this bird. They arrive in Colorado late in spring migration, just as that season tips toward summer. They leave before autumn begins whispering of winter. But the bird isn't just a sign of the seasons. Their presence speaks of the complexity of our climate, the non-human world, and the human/non-human nexus. Obligate feeders on flying insects, the Common

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Nighthawk's steep population decline over the past half-century may relate to broader declines in their prey, owing to pesticide use, the warming planet, and other factors. Nighthawks are losing habitat, too. Some of that habitat is their wild habitat of grasslands and forests. But they're also losing built habitats in urban and suburban environments. Nighthawks use the flat, gravel-covered roofs of many urban buildings as nesting sites. Unfortunately for the birds, most new development forgoes gravel for other materials, such as rubber. (Patches of gravel, installed on flat roofs, are a potential compromise that may support nesting nighthawks. New Hampshire's "Project Nighthawk" is experimenting with this.)

The fate of Common Nighthawks is tethered to us, in ways that the fates of many non-human animals are. But it isn't easy to observe our entangled destinies. Nighthawks are not like the chickadees that visit our feeders, the finches and phoebes that nest on nooks around our houses, the corvids that seem more at home around our homes than we do, or the hawks that hunt on our highways. Nighthawks nest on our skylines. They migrate at incredible heights, and the vast majority of these birds pass over our summer and fall activities without being noticed. By day, they disappear into trees, grasses, and rocks. Their cryptic feathering renders them invisible. If you've ever lucked into a sighting of a nighthawk on a tree, you know how easy it would be to overlook the bird. You also know that nighthawks don't care that you've found them. Their faith in their camouflage, their use of difficult to access perches, and the fact that they have no need for daytime activity allows them to tolerate proximity to us.

Ultimately, my trajectory and the Common Nighthawk's did not intersect during their nesting season. Perhaps this is a sign of the species' decline or of my neighborhood's hostility, with our grassy lawns and dependence on pesticides, to the birds and their prey. Perhaps it is only that I have not yet found our shared trajectory.

But I have learned something else from this effort. Pursue this uncommon bird, during the uncommon hours of dawn and dusk, and you will find the trajectory of other uncommon creatures. Those brown bats, one of which dropped me to my knees by hunting at the brim of my hat. A raccoon, ambling down a drainage ditch. A coyote, patrolling an undeveloped field. Fox kits, playfully hunting along a neighborhood path. Great Horned Owls, perched in suburban parking lots and cemeteries. A Mule Deer pair, cautiously watching the human animals who ride bikes, and toss baseballs, and walk dogs while seeking nighthawks in fields near riparian corridors.

Jared Del Rosso is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Denver. Among many other things, he teaches courses on urban wildlife. He is an avid birder, a volunteer with the High Line Canal Conservancy, and a semi-professional woolgatherer.





CONSERVATION

12 Tips for '21: Make the switch to “bird-friendly” coffee

*Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. **12 for '21** aims to tell readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily activities. Look for more each month throughout 2021.*

Sharon Tinianow

A year ago in *The Lark Bunting*, I wrote about why what you eat and drink matters to birds — or rather to bird populations. The connections between our purchasing choices and bird conservation are often difficult to discern. But in the case of coffee, the choice is clear. Coffee certified as Bird Friendly® — more about that trademark shortly — is grown in a manner that helps preserve habitat for birds. Since habitat loss is the number one threat to bird populations, switching to bird-

friendly coffee is often mentioned as one of the [seven simple actions](#) you can take to help birds. But I do not think it is all that easy.

A bit of background: the coffee plant evolved to grow in the shade. But as coffee rose in popularity, many farms in Central and South America and the Caribbean converted to full-sun operations to take advantage of higher yields. Now, so many of our songbirds spend the winter in forest habitat south of the Equator that the loss of a diverse tree canopy threatens their survival.

Consider this: field work by the [Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center](#) in Peru determined that sun-grown coffee supports 61 species of birds. Partially shade-grown coffee supports 79 bird species. But shade-grown coffee certified as “bird-friendly,” which requires that the surrounding forest include more tree species and more mature trees, supports 243 bird species. As a result, “Bird Friendly®” is the gold standard for shade-grown coffee. The growing conditions behind this trademarked seal of approval (created by Smithsonian scientists) do more to protect bird habitat than any other of the growing standards that carry their own eco-friendly endorsements.

With that grounding, I decided to test bird-friendly varieties for availability and taste. Searching the internet for Colorado sources of bird-friendly coffee, I found three options at Front Range grocery stores:

- **Allegro**, founded in Boulder in 1977 and now in partnership with Whole Foods, has one variety that is certified Bird Friendly® and is available whole bean or ground at Whole Foods stores and its own flagship café/roastery in Denver
- **Ampersand**, a coffee roaster in Boulder, offers two blends of Bird Friendly® coffee. It is available at the store in Boulder, at several markets and shops in Boulder and Denver, or by order online
- **Birds and Beans** is the Smithsonian's own brand. All six blends, including a decaf and an espresso, are Bird Friendly® certified. They are available in some Natural Grocers stores, at Wild Birds Unlimited, and at Front Range Birding Company, as well as online

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Although I tried and did not like the Allegro Bird Friendly® blend, it is easy to come by and worth trying. The Birds and Beans website says Natural Grocers stores carry its coffee, but when I visited two Denver stores, one did not have it or any other certified brand, and the other carried only pre-ground coffee (I like to grind my own).

Frustrated in my attempts to buy locally, I ordered online. Both the Ampersand and Birds and Beans websites make this very easy, and the coffee arrived promptly.

On to step two: which variety matches my coffee preference? Knowing tastes vary widely among people, and that coffee is prepared in multiple ways, I enlisted the help of several other coffee drinkers I know — family and fellow DFO members. Here are their reviews from a blind taste test, and how they prepared their coffee:

Ampersand Honduras Marcala (medium roast)

I really have to admire how balanced this one is. It doesn't lean strongly toward bitter or acidic but presents a perfectly smooth flavor that I think would make it a good crowd pleaser, or a good standard for people who just drink a lot of coffee regularly. My taste tends to change with the seasons, but I can definitely see myself coming back to this one again and again.

— **Samuel Shaw** (French press)

Ampersand Dark Honduras Marcala (dark roast)

Before grinding, I did a double take. Are these beans really dark roast? Maybe the medium color tricked my taste buds, but I expected fuller body, a bit bitter. I even let it steep an extra half minute in the French press. Nothing wrong here; a decent cup of coffee — just not the swarthy I expected. If offered, I'd have this for a midday break.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll** (French press)

Birds and Beans American Redstart (light roast)

As someone who tends to fall back on a traditional breakfast blend, this one is right up my alley. The flavor is slightly acidic, but not to the extent that it tastes what I'd call bright or fruity. It's exactly the kind of thing that's going to be in the Thermos in my saddle bag for a weekend morning bike ride. I think it would pair really well with brunch or pastries.

— **Samuel Shaw** (French press)

Good! Just the right bit of aftertaste. It is close between A (Ampersand medium roast) and C (Birds and Beans light roast) but I also think I could drink C on the most regular basis.

— **Peter Stoltz** (Aeropress)

Birds and Beans Chestnut-sided Warbler (med/dark roast)

This hits my personal sweet spot, from first sip to, as Maxwell House says, "the last drop." For a fan of darker roasts, this delivered bolder flavor, but minus the mouthful of bitter I expected. The edge here is subtler. I'm falling back on the S-word again: smooth. To my palate, this is best in show.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll** (French press)

Delighted me with its sweet coffee flavor on the first sip, although it lacked the robustness I'm accustomed to in my daily coffee.

— **Susan Blansett** (drip coffeemaker)

Far and away favorite with the best taste (I am biased toward darker roasts).

— **Steve Ryder** (drip coffeemaker)

As for me? I continued to explore Birds and Beans coffees and have settled on the Wood Thrush blend (I brew by pour-over method).

Admittedly, bird friendly coffee will cost more than other blends. But both Ampersand and Birds and Beans offer subscription services. Signing up online for regular delivery will save you some money on the cost of beans.

For more information, check out this excellent [article by the Earth Institute](#). Look for the Bird Friendly® coffee logo when you purchase your coffee, and you can feel good about doing something to protect bird habitat while still enjoying that cup o' joe.

Whither DFO's Colonial Waterbirds Project?

Patrick O'Driscoll

Five Aprils ago, an idea hatched in a DFO Field Trip Leader Forum debuted in the pages of *The Lark Bunting*. Under the headline, “**Introducing the DFO Colonial Waterbird Project**,” we announced a citizen science project for club members to observe and track several kinds of charismatic avian megafauna — herons, egrets and cormorants — at nesting sites around metro Denver.

“They nest among us,” the April 2017 newsletter article began. “They congregate like we do, too, within sight of downtown skyscrapers and favorite suburban haunts. What’s more, their island high-rises are open for everyone to see.” The five locations we chose would be a public stage upon which Denver Field Ornithologists could act on a key phrase in our club’s bylaws: “To promote interest in the study and preservation of birds and their habitats.”

Keeping an eye out for the welfare of these populations of wild birds that nest communally among us made sense. Both birders and park-goers share a fascination with these big birds — Great Blue Herons, Black-crowned Night-herons, Snowy Egrets and Double-crested Cormorants — and their big nests. Once or twice a month from the birds’ arrival in February, March and April to the fledging of their last chicks in mid- to late summer, DFO would track their numbers, their reproductive success, the condition of their nesting sites, and the effects of natural and human activity on them.

Unfortunately, as we begin the fifth season, participation has lagged far behind our initial enthusiasm. The first season, spring and summer of 2017, 115 separate observations were tallied and shared via eBird. But the data was difficult to sort out of eBird lists, and so in 2018 we switched to a citizen science compilation website, [CitSci.org](https://citisci.org), in cooperation with Bird Conservancy of the

Rockies. Participation gradually declined, to 96 reports in 2018 and 75 in 2019. During the 2020 season, with the Covid-19 pandemic overshadowing so much DFO activity, it ebbed to reports only from the two Denver locations, Washington Park and Denver City Park.

Despite annual appeals and efforts to promote project participation, a total of only about 20 people have ever signed up in four years. Of those, only about a dozen have submitted any observations. At two locations — Belmar Park in Lakewood and Tabor Lake in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt — reports have totaled fewer than five a year, and sometimes none. The remaining three — the two Denver parks and the Cherry Creek-Parker Water & Sanitation District ponds — have reported the bulk of the observations.

To be fair, logistics for volunteers have been challenging. The first year, sharing eBird lists was the height of simplicity, though handling the data once there proved problematic. The shift to CitSci.org required filling out observation forms (either on paper or via a smartphone app). Either way, it was a far more complicated process. Since then, the lack of response to appeals for participants and the pandemic’s fog over so much participatory activity since 2020 have brought the project to something of a crossroads.

Do we scale back the Colonial Waterbirds Project to two or three locations with the current skeleton crew of participants? Do we refocus our interest in these bird colonies and advocate for their continued welfare (some locations are showing noticeable physical decline) rather than focus on tallying their numbers?

As coordinator of the project, I am open to your suggestions, feedback and participation. Drop me a note at patodrisk@gmail.com, or if you’d like to discuss, call me at 303-885-6955.

Before doing either, I encourage you first to visit the Citizen Science page of the DFO website (<https://dfobirds.org/Birds/CitizenScience.aspx>), where we have posted a PowerPoint overview of the project and some somewhat-dated but still useful background documents about it. Thanks for reading.



STATE WILDLIFE AREAS

Colorado creates new non-hunter/fisher permit for State Wildlife Area users

Roger Koester and Patrick O'Driscoll

A new state pass that allows birders and other non-hunter, non-angler outdoor enthusiasts to enter Colorado's 350 State Wildlife Areas will be implemented Saturday, May 1 by order of the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Commission.

The Colorado SWA Pass, adopted by the commission at its March 17 meeting after months of consideration, is meant to deal with growing numbers of non-“sportsman” visitors to wildlife preserves that were originally created only with hook-and-bullet users in mind.

As an interim measure, Colorado last year began requiring that non-hunting, non-fishing visitors, including birders, purchase and carry a state fishing or hunting license. This was because these protected zones of wildlife habitat were paid for by hunters and anglers via licenses and fees. Colorado Parks & Wildlife had said the growing popularity of SWAs for “non-consumptive” recreation — birding, hiking, wildlife photography and other outdoor activities — has taxed the agency's ability to manage and protect them.

The cost of the new annual pass will be roughly the same as is being charged now — \$46.48 — and will be required for anyone older than age 16. That amount represents the cost of an annual fishing license, plus a \$10.40 habitat stamp required of most licensees and a small education fee. As with fishing licenses, the new permit will have reduced fees for three groups: youths age 16-17, seniors 65 and up, and low-income residents (\$10.07 for each category). A single-day version of the pass will cost \$9, about the cost of a daily pass at state parks. Unlike park passes, however, these new non-game permits admit holders only as individuals, not like the vehicle stickers that admit all occupants of a car into a state park.

The new permits will be valid from March 1 of the current year through March 31 of the following year to coincide with

fishing license terms. Access to SWAs under the new pass will not be allowed during hunting seasons, however.

In announcing the new pass, Colorado Parks & Wildlife posted a revised two-page [fact sheet and frequently asked questions](#) about SWAs and the new pass. Some of the explanatory language about why the permit is necessary suggests a somewhat grudging tolerance for non-hunter, non-angler use of these wildlife preserves.

For instance, one passage about the “significant trend of people engaging in activities for which these properties were not intended” goes on to state that such uses “run the gamut from illegal camping to engaging in recreational activities that disturb and displace wildlife.” At another point, the fact sheet repeats that the addition of the SWA pass is “a recognition of the increasing pressure on SWAs by people who are displacing wildlife and disrupting the intent of these properties,” then adds, “While hiking, for example, has been allowed on SWAs, it was never an intended use of the properties.” Yet another passage, about the commission decision, describes the pass as “an option for those who are unable or unwilling to purchase a hunting or fishing license.”

While it is true that the new permit came about after non-fish-and-game users objected to being counted as hunters or anglers by having to buy and carry licenses for those pursuits, the reason was not refusal but rather advocacy for wildlife. The DFO Conservation Committee joined the discussion last summer with a survey of club membership showing 75 percent of respondents supported having a separate “non-consumptive” permit or license for SWA use. DFO's position was not “unwillingness” but rather a desire that the contribution of responsible, non-game outdoor enthusiasts, including birders, be recognized and counted as such by Colorado Parks & Wildlife.

Continued on page 19

Spring cleaning? Dust off finances, too

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third in a series of monthly tips from the DFO Finance Committee about tax-saving ways to contribute to Denver Field Ornithologists.

Roger Koester and Sue Summers

Ah, spring! Any minute now, those first seasonal migrants will be in your backyard or along your favorite birding trail (if they aren't already). They are always a good reason to pause in whatever constitutes your spring cleaning routine and appreciate the return of our winged friends.

Like home and yard, something else may deserve airing out and tidying up this time of year — your financial planning. As you finish those 2020 income tax returns, there are tax-effective things you can do now to manage your finances for 2021, too, particularly for charitable giving.

As we have mentioned in earlier articles, you can still claim a tax deduction for gifts to nonprofits like DFO without having to itemize your deductions. For 2021, non-itemizers can deduct up to \$300 from income for charitable gifts — and that amount doubles to \$600 for couples filing jointly.

Also in 2021, if you're over 72, you can designate all or part of any Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your Individual Retirement Account to go directly to an eligible charity or nonprofit — once again, without having to pay a dime of income tax on that money.

This is also a great time to review your longer-term estate plan. Have you named or updated lately the names of beneficiaries for any and all assets from your estate? Just as with that tax exemption for a required distribution from your IRA, any portion of your estate assets that you designate to go to a qualified charitable organization like DFO is not subject to estate inheritance tax.

The reason for doing this now isn't just seasonal, it's smart. Gifts to nonprofits and charities have much more value and impact than with after-tax income. Where DFO is concerned, you now have a choice in putting your donations to use. You can designate your gift for general support of the club as a Friend of DFO, or for awarding grants for research and education in preserving birds and their habitats through the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund.

You can send DFO gifts or notifications of planned estate gifts to DFO Treasurer **Sue Summers** at 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton CO 80120, using DFO's federal tax ID number: **23-7019669**. As with all financial decisions, we recommend that you talk first with your accountant, investment adviser or attorney before making any financial decisions.

PERMITS *cont from page 18*

"We birders are proud that we tread lightly on the land," said **Susan Blansett**, DFO vice president and acting chair of the Conservation Committee. "At least now, Parks & Wildlife is counting us as non-consumptive users and gathering user data that DFO, with other birding groups, successfully lobbied for in this change."

Blansett acknowledged that the state "has an extraordinarily difficult balance to maintain" in honoring the intent of SWAs while trying to handle increased pressure on these lands from many users. "Who among us," she added, "has not witnessed damage in our parks and open spaces by careless campers and picnickers, some hikers with dogs and, yes, sloppy fishermen, too — the ones who litter the shore with empty bait containers or leave tangles of used fishing line that can ensnare and even kill waterfowl and other birds?"

Blansett said DFO stands ready to partner with Parks & Wildlife "to strengthen our relationship and promote safer, more sustainable habitat for Colorado's wildlife." As an example, she suggested collaborating on a "Leave No Trace" campaign to heighten awareness among SWA users about minimizing their footprint on these wildland preserves.

A commission study group whose work led to the new pass will reconvene later this spring to address two issues in further detail: how to reduce negative effects of human activity on SWAs, and how to improve conservation in those areas.



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:

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THE LARK BUNTING

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 06 | JUNE 2021

DFOBIRDS.ORG

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hallelujah, we're OPEN again, DFO!

BIRDING ESSAY

The Towhee's Lesson in Noticing

DFO NEWS

Did somebody say, "DFO field trip"? They're baa-aack

CONSERVATION

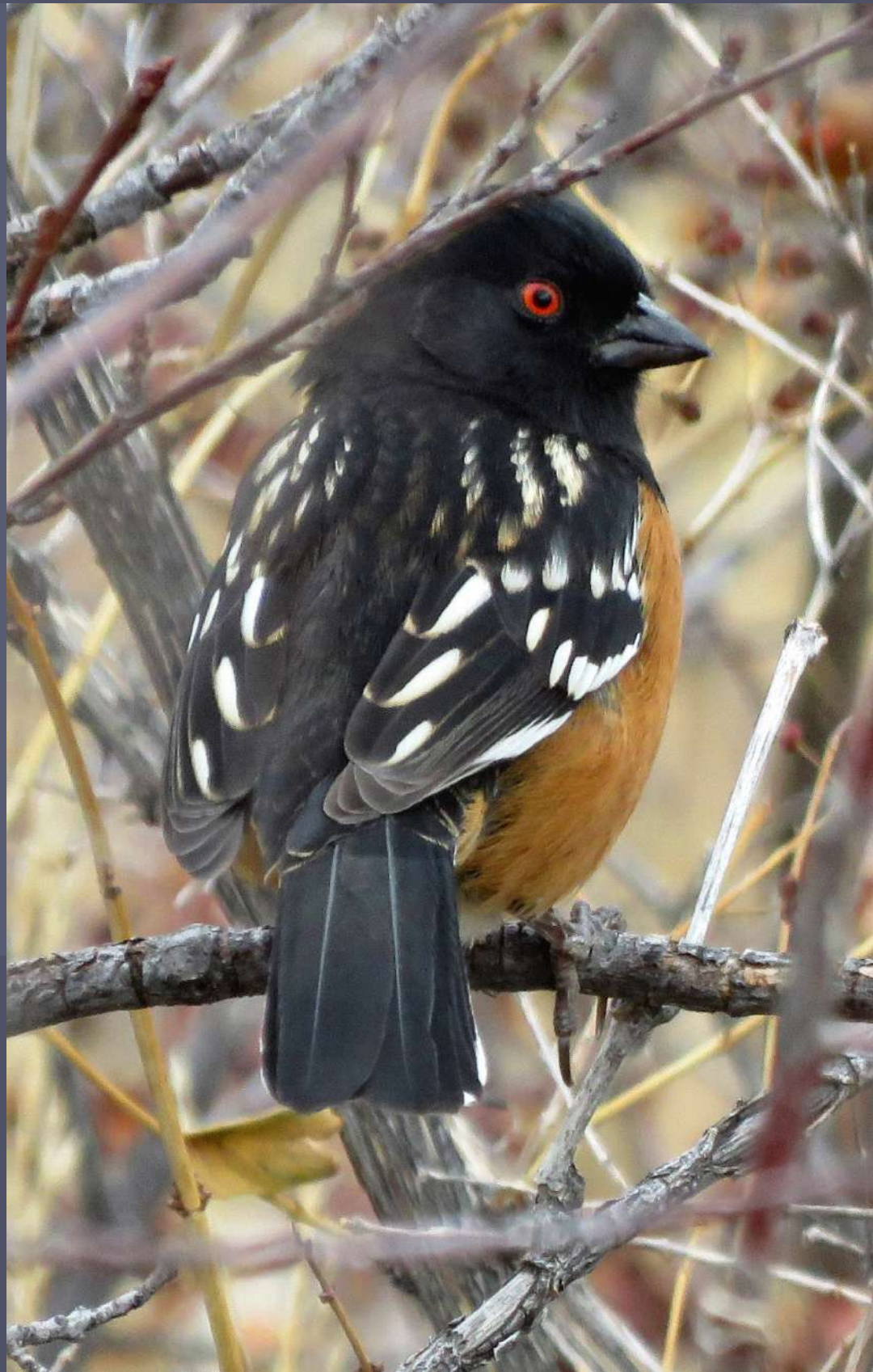
12 Tips for '21:
Native plants + bugs
= more yard birds

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Spotted Towhee

📷 Patrick O'Driscoll

📍 Inspiration Point Park
Denver, CO





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hallelujah, we're OPEN again, DFO!

Susan Blansett

Can you *believe* there are actually Denver Field Ornithologists *field* trips back on the schedule, after nearly 14 pandemic months off? The thought of being in the field, together with *actual* other people, in some of our favorite group-birding habitats, with a great DFO trip leader leading the way . . . well, it quickens the pulse and brings a smile to the face (to mine, anyway!).

Dave Hill, who just completed two years as our club's president, once again organized a full slate of DFO Spring Bird Count trips for May 7, 8 and 9, led by our corps of trip leaders. (As of this writing, there were still a few slots open, too.) Meanwhile, **Mark Amershek**, **John Breitsch**, **Karen Drozda** and others have put more great regular field trips on the calendar, too.

It may take us a while to get back to our normal schedule, and we'll continue to observe some Covid-19 protocols to be safe. Still, it's an awesome feeling, isn't it? Pardon me, friends, but we have come through one helluva year!

And so 2021 is a time of fresh promise, even though we're not all the way out of Pandemic World yet. Most of our members and many friends and family have been vaccinated. Spring migration is cranking up, birdsong fills the air and the first fledglings are testing their wings. The seasonal return of the birds is cause for us to celebrate, but there are many other reasons, too. Here's one for the birds themselves: the recent decision by the new administration to restore full protection to some of those migrating millions by revoking the onerous 2017 Interior Department action that weakened the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Looking forward, I feel lucky to be your new president just now, and I'm excited to pass another baton to the very capable **Steve Ryder** as the new chair of the DFO Conservation Committee. I am humbled to follow those

who served as president before me, and am so grateful for our terrific DFO Board of Directors. I'd need way more than fingers and toes to count everything I've learned from Dave Hill, **Chuck Hundertmark**, **Mary Cay Burger**, so many past board members and, yes, the late **Joe Roller**, whose death last year we still mourn. Gratitude and excitement are my watchwords for 2021.

Under Dave's recent congenial leadership, we learned much on the fly as an organization during our pandemic year-plus. DFO transitioned practically overnight to online meetings, Zoom-based programs and workshops, "together apart" virtual field trips, and new organizational collaborations with the City and County of Denver, Denver Audubon and the Denver Public Library.

Fortunately for us, our steadfast members (and quite a few new ones) embraced that new reality. You responded enthusiastically to remote participation in our monthly speaker programs and extra presentations, surpassing our previous in-person attendance many times over. Faced with the Covid challenge, everything in DFO kicked up a notch. Our membership grew back above 500. The Conservation Committee got very involved on your behalf. The terrific [*let's go birding* YouTube channel](#) by member **Megan Miller** and friends helped spread the DFO word. This newsletter continued to communicate it all in colorful pictures and prose. In short, DFO has grown into a better organization. What a silver lining to 2020!

DFO's growth brings new opportunities. Be sure to read **Sharon Tinianow's** "Volunteer Here!" article in this issue (page 18) about ways that your considerable individual talents can make DFO better still. In that vein, thank you again to Dave Hill, 2021 HawkWatch coordinator **Carol Cwiklinski**, and the wonderful HawkWatch volunteers for making the annual monitoring of spring raptor migration at Dinosaur Ridge such a success.

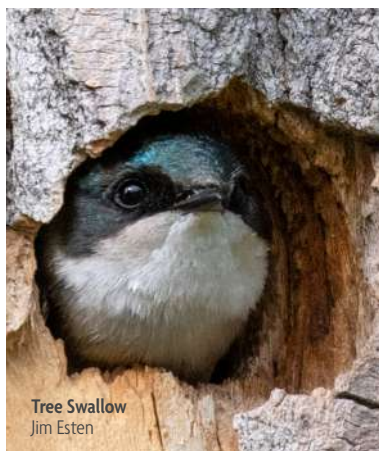
Continued on page 3

"It's fun to experience the rhythm of migration of raptors, passerines and other wildlife from the top of a ridge," Carol told me. "We see hawks, eagles and falcons from above, below and at eye level, which is an excellent way to learn how to identify them. It is local citizen science contributing to international hawk migration counts." Our thanks to the rest of Carol and Dave's team, including **Steve Small, Mike and Karen Fernandez, Pam Batton, Gary Rossmiller, Debbie James, Santi Tabares, Reed Gorner, Janet Peters, Bea Weaver, Kathy Holland, Walt Combs**, and me, too!

I have lost count (but not track) of the many friends I've made and the myriad ways my life has been enriched since Joe Roller convinced me to volunteer for DFO more than five years ago. I hope you'll experience for yourself the joy of giving a little time to our organization. Here's to a great year of birding and friendship together.

See you in the field,

— **Susan**



DFO ELECTION

Members update DFO leadership in online vote

Patrick O'Driscoll

As expected, the slate of eight candidates seeking office as officers and board members of DFO was elected in April through the club's second year of remote balloting because of the Covid-19 pandemic. About one-quarter of DFO's 500-plus members voted using the Survey Monkey online app.

Susan Blansett, DFO vice president for the past two years, was elected president and takes over for the now past president, **Dave Hill**. **Sharon Tinianow**, chair of DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee and former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, was elected vice president. **Peter Stoltz**, DFO secretary for the past year after nominating himself for the vacant position, was re-elected, as was **Sue Summers**, DFO treasurer for the past five years.

Members also re-elected three members of the DFO Board of Directors and voted in a fourth, all for three-year terms. **Steve Ryder** is the new director and also serves as chair of the DFO Conservation Committee. Those re-elected are **Karen Drozda**, a field trip leader and chair of the DFO Better Birding Skills Committee; DFO grants chair **Elaine Wagner**, first voted onto the board in 2020 by directors on an interim basis; and **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, a field trip leader, member of two club committees, and coordinator of DFO's Colonial Waterbirds citizen-science project.

Until 2020, DFO officers and board members were elected by in-person balloting at the club's annual membership meeting each April. After the spread of coronavirus forced DFO to suspend all field trips, program meetings and other group events, the club decided to conduct the 2020 election via the Internet. That year, about 140 members voted. This year about 125 cast ballots online during a two-week voting period (April 13-27). In both cases, participation far outstripped typical attendance and voting when the election was at in-person annual meetings.

Unlike last year, no one self-nominated to be on the election ballot in 2021. Any member in good standing can self-nominate for any office or seat, all of which are volunteer positions.

In anticipation of continuing to conduct DFO elections online even after in-person meetings and programs resume, the DFO Board recently approved revisions in the club bylaws to accommodate the practice.



Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO NEWS

Did somebody say, “DFO field trip”? They’re baa-aack

Patrick O'Driscoll

That's no misprint, DFO brethren. After 14 months in Covid-19 exile, Denver Field Ornithologists' most popular activity has returned: Free, in-person DFO field trips.

The club is starting out small, hewing to state and local limits on “outdoor guided services” (including field trips) that allow a maximum of six participants per trip for now. Birders will still be cautioned to be pandemic-safe, with continued social-distancing and no carpooling except among those in the same household. Although state and county health guidance about wearing masks outdoors is changing, participants must carry masks and should wear them whenever situations in the field make keeping social distance difficult.

DFO field trip leaders already scheduled several Spring Bird Count trips May 7-8-9. But after that, at least 10 regular field trips are scheduled, starting May 10. More trips will follow in June and beyond as birders accustomed to solo or “plus 1” outings on their own reacquaint themselves with group birding. To check the schedule and register for a trip, visit DFO's Field Trip webpage at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>.

“We understand that after 14 months without group outings, some DFO members may be reluctant at first to gather with more than a trusted friend or two in the field,” said DFO Field Trip Director **Karen von Saltza**, who will retire from her position this spring. “We have organized these first trips to reassure participants that safety remains utmost.”

For one thing, trip participation is limited to half the size of a typical 12-person outing before the spread of coronavirus forced DFO to shut down all field trips in mid-March of 2020. Also at first, trips will be only half-day outings to birding destinations within the greater Denver-Boulder metro area. In part, this is to minimize the need for carpooling, which DFO does not allow except among members of the same household. Like other precautions, the club expects that restriction to be lifted eventually as the year progresses.

DFO already is using the field-trip format to conduct its annual Spring Bird Count.

The long pandemic pause in field outings allowed DFO to transition to a new and revised field trip liability waiver form and install a more legally robust electronic signature feature for the waiver. Anyone clicking on the field trip link on DFO's home page for the first time since March 2020 will be re-directed to read and sign the new waiver form before registering. Once that's done, they automatically move on to the trip registration page. People can also go directly to the waiver page to renew their waiver by electronically signing at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/Waiver.aspx>.



Resplendent Quetzal, Costa Rica
Wikipedia

Aves de Pura Vida: Birding in Costa Rica

Monday, August 23

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

In Costa Rica, the words “Pura Vida” — literally “pure life” — are an all-purpose expression: both hello and goodbye (think “aloha” in Hawai‘i), but also a toast, a cheer, a saying of celebration, an attitude of acceptance. The phrase is ubiquitous, everywhere.

And like “Pura Vida,” birds are everywhere in Costa Rica, too. Although Central America’s most easy-going country is less than one-fourth the size of Colorado, it is home to more than 900 species — greater than in all 49 U.S. mainland states and Canada combined. The mind-boggling color, richness and variety of Costa Rica’s avifauna are a feast for the eyes and ears, from the Resplendent Quetzal

and Scarlet Macaw to the Violet Sabrewing (one of its more than 50 hummingbird species). Costa Rica’s birds also include many of the neotropical migrants that spend part of their lives in Colorado.

The guest speaker for this Aug. 23 program is unnamed at present but will be one of the professional birding guides in Costa Rica that DFO program manager **Bill Turner** knows and is in contact with. The expert presenter will lead DFO’s Zoom webinar participants through an exploration of birds in the country’s diverse and wide-ranging regions, from lowland rainforests on both the Pacific and the Caribbean coasts to the dry, tropical forest of the northwest and the bird-rich highlands of the Talamanca Mountains in the south.

Look for more details and a sign-up link for this Zoom presentation in the July-August issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Scott Somershoe

A Green Big Year: My 2021 birding quest for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant

Monday, September 27

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Mark your calendar now for this autumn evening program with DFO member **Scott Somershoe**, land birds coordinator for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region. On Jan. 1, he embarked on his second “Green Big Year” — a self-powered, carbon-free quest to record as many species in Colorado as possible, but only on foot or bicycle from his home in Littleton. Aiming for at least 250 species this year (he found 244 in his year-long 2020 pursuit), Somershoe has already listed 181 species through the first few days of May 2021.

That number is important not just for the achievement, but because he is gathering per-species pledges and flat donations for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant for bird research in Colorado. Somershoe and Colorado Field Ornithologists established the fund in tribute to **Joe Roller**, the longtime Colorado ambassador for birding and member of both DFO and CFO, who died last November.

In September, Somershoe will tell the story of his Big Year so far, from planning and logistics to adventures and misadventures, “the birds, the bike routes, the people and the experiences.” He said he set out to “honor Joe’s legacy” — and he is finding that this “marathon effort is challenging in many ways . . . balancing being a husband, father of three, work, and my physical output.”

Look for more details to sign up for this Zoom webinar presentation in the next two issues of *The Lark Bunting*. To follow Somershoe’s Green Big Year endeavor until then, visit his Joe Roller Memorial Green Big Year blog at <https://jrmemorialgreenbigyear.blogspot.com/>.

PROGRAM REVIEW

On a snowy Colorado night, clever tools for good birding in bad (for the birds) weather

Patrick O'Driscoll

The forecast for DFO's April 19 evening program called for the usual: An hour-long shower of interesting and useful bird-related information, with a 100 percent chance of audience questions afterward, combining to dissipate some of the fog of uncertainty about the selected topic.

The program itself, however, was not the same old same old. Colorado's own near-celebrity birding weatherman, Longmont meteorologist (and birder) **Bryan Guarente**, was in the virtual house. More than 150 listener-viewers on Zoom got a clear and understandable mini-tutorial in forecasting spring migration weather — and, therefore, potentially epic birding opportunities — for themselves.

With the first inch of a spring snowstorm accumulating outside, Guarente opened his presentation — “Go Birding in Bad (aka the Right) Weather” — with an analogy about early human aviation and bird migration. He compared today's journeys by birds migrating from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula across the Gulf of Mexico to the first transatlantic flight in 1919. In both cases, the fliers flew blindly through clouds that concealed the true nature of the weather ahead.

View the complete video of “Birding in Bad (aka the Right) Weather”
in DFO's “Past Programs” archive:
<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

In the human fliers' case, it was the pre-satellite weathercasting era, with stray radio signals as the only clues beyond headwinds or tailwinds to whatever lay beyond the nose of the plane. Bound for Ireland from Nova Scotia, British aviators **John Alcock** and **Arthur Brown** felt their way blindly through fog (blocking initial navigation by sextant), near-misses with the surface of the icy Atlantic, and a snowstorm endured in failed electric-heating suits. After 16 hours aloft, they somehow landed in County Galway, with an abrupt nose-down halt in a bog that had looked like dry land from the air.

For spring migrant birds, south-southeastern tailwinds (Guarente explained that wind direction is where it's coming from, not where it's going) are the only green light, with no yellows or reds to warn if they are flying north into unseen but life-threatening storms. “They rhetorically lick a feather, test the wind, wait for a tailwind, and go,” he said.

Continued on page 7

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 6*

Guarente, who trains meteorologists at Boulder’s UCAR, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, has extended his work to help Colorado birders understand the relationship between weather and bird migration. When migration and unsettled spring weather converge, he is often on COBirds, posting detailed but understandable analyses of what birding weather may be in store.

“This is your chance to learn how I go about finding situations that are useful for birdwatchers,” Guarente told the Zoom audience. He then introduced the simple math — and a clever weather website — behind his birding weather lesson: using factors like convergence of winds and precipitation to gauge where the best birding in bad weather might be. In other words: Convergence + Precipitation = Possibility.

When spring winds in the Gulf region converge from more than one southerly direction, as they sometimes do, they usually concentrate lots of birds in one northward push. If the way ahead is clear — no major weather to block their way across the water and inland — it’s good for the birds, not the birders. But if bad weather looms, that concentration of exhausted birds must find its way around and down to ground for rest and replenishment. Bad for birds, good for birding.

Guarente illustrated this with what could become a new favorite for bad-weather birders — <https://Earth.nullschool.net>, a website with animated computer and satellite-driven maps of 7-days-ahead global weather. On the site’s ocean-blue maps swirling with feathery green lines of wind, he led the audience in a couple of examples.

First, Guarente deciphered the forces that led to an epic bird fallout on Galveston’s High Island on the Texas coast (130 species where only 30 were the previous day.) Strong tailwinds had converged (with many birds) on a purple bruise on the map — a powerful coastline thunderstorm blocking just where the birds needed to reach land or fall short in the Gulf and die trying. “This is a problem, and the birds are desperate to find land at this point,” he said. “Some of them died. Some of them survived.” Even though the map view was from miles above, one could almost see (and urge on) the flocks that managed to skirt east of the thunderstorm to land at High Island.

Second, Guarente laid out the variables for the same week of unsettled spring weather that was dropping snow at that moment outside the windows of most everyone in his Zoom audience. He analyzed the forecast winds and precipitation near a small circle on the map that represented his house north of Boulder. The upshot was far more subtle than the Gulf example, but conditions were still setting up for decent migration birding over eastern Colorado three days later: “It looks like it’s going to be a good day, when we’re going to start to see more migrants,” though no fallout or strong concentration.

“Birds have lasted with this relationship (with wind and weather) far longer than we have,” Guarente concluded, “and they’re doing it without technology.”

Gorgeously Photoshopped field guides are the proof in Yorkshire birdman's pudding

Patrick O'Driscoll

If **Roger Tory Peterson**, **David Sibley** and **Kenn Kaufman** are iconic, then **Richard Crossley** must be iconoclastic.

In the manner of most guidebook authors, those three lions of the field surround their bird illustrations with many words of species description and identification esoterica. But the creator of the relentlessly illustrated *Crossley ID Guides* prefers another approach. He piles photo upon photo (11,000 per guide), the fewer words the better, and lets the eyes of reader-viewers do most of the sorting out.

“Bird ID is the root of all evil!” Crossley spouted during a highly entertaining, hour-long monologue April 5 in a special evening program for a DFO audience of about 170 Zoom listener-viewers. “It’s not about having the biggest bloody list! . . . For me, everything is about understanding, not about names and numbers. It’s not about the answer — it’s about knowing what to ask . . . Once I have all the answers, you can stick me 6 feet under.”

His presentation, co-sponsored with DFO by the Denver Public Library, was titled “There and Back: Waterfowl and More.” Crossley, who migrated to America in young adulthood from his native Yorkshire, England, emphasized the “more” part. At times sputtering and gesticulating like wild gusts of wind on his home county’s moors, Crossley expounded upon many things, including his 16,000-mile cross-country trip to Alaska, the sorry state of birding in the U.S., and the fashionable tyranny of bird “listing” versus the more patient, deliberate observation and understanding he (and his guides) advocate. (Yes, he discussed waterfowl, too, as he has a *Crossley ID Guide* devoted entirely to ducks and geese.)

In a still-thick Yorkshire accent, Crossley regaled the audience with a lively spiel of birding facts and opinions. He spiced his remarks with both deadpan humor and occasional cranky broadsides at those who regard his picture-filled guides as

unsuitable for serious birders and meant only for children or beginners. (His website does describe them as “the guide for beginning and intermediate birders.”) In his DFO talk, Crossley called them “a halfway house between reality and the old-school field guide.”

At the prior request of the speaker, the Zoom video of “There and Back: Waterfowl and More” was posted only briefly and is no longer available on DFO’s “Past Programs” website

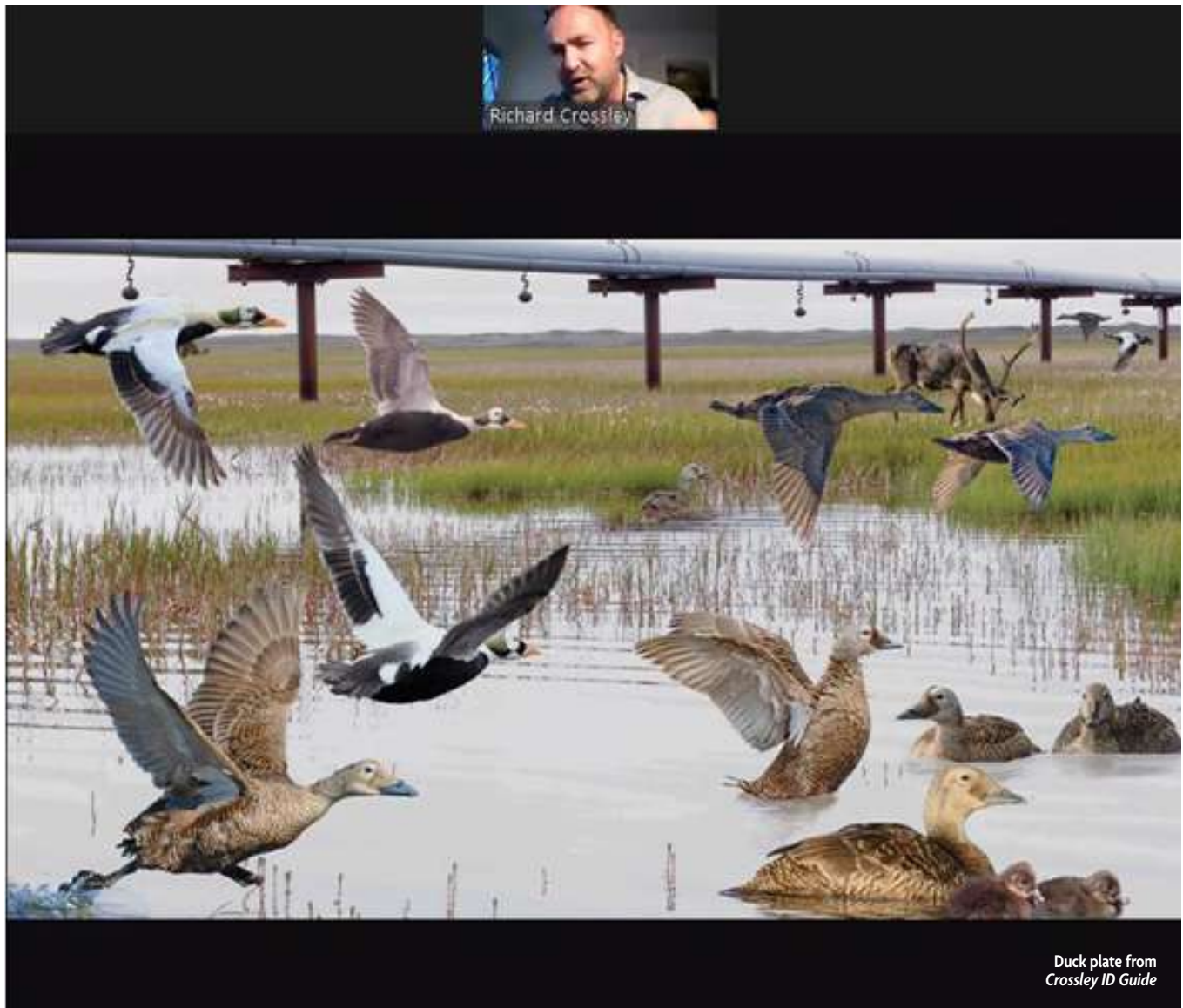
“In England, they don’t take guidebooks into the field,” he said at one point. “Mine are designed to teach you, to make you a better birder.” In Crossley’s view, studying his multiple photographic views and aspects of each bird in numerous locales and field situations gives glimpses of real life, not stylized paintings and drawings. “It’s time to move on and show birds in their habitat,” he declared. “This is the 21st century.”

Crossley also suggested his Photoshop mashups of dozens of bird photos on colorful, richly detailed plates are as artistic — and more packed with useful visual information besides — than the drawings and paintings of the guidebook giants. “Basically,” he said, “I paint with pixels.”

At another point, he half-groused, “I get a lot of hate mail because I’m not getting a western guide (to birds) out,” as he did years ago with his *The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds*. That’s about to change. His website now is taking pre-orders for *The Crossley ID Guide: Western Birds*.

Crossley also has strong beliefs about the need to cooperate more with the hunting community, especially Ducks Unlimited, with whom birders share a passion for preserving and improving habitat. “When I go to hunting festivals, people are not talking about shooting birds, but about

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wetlands,” he noted. “We all love going out in nature. We just use different tools.” He also said the drive for conservation in North America has “saved so much land” but does “a terrible job of managing it, and doesn’t connect people to it.”

Crossley scoffed as well at surveys claiming there are as many as 45 million birders (or more) in America. “It’s not borne out by membership” in birding organizations, he contended. Otherwise, “Where the hell is everybody, and why aren’t we connecting to them?” He also said America “must get more young people into birding . . . When you get in as a youngster, you’re willing to die for it, literally.”

During questions and answers at the end of his talk, Crossley elaborated on his views of obsession with lists and species ID instead of patient, close observation of birds themselves. “Don’t try to name and list birds. Observe, watch,” he urged. “Whatever you see, sit down . . . be in the moment. The more you look, the more questions you’ll ask. Everybody’s into lists over here because of eBird. But if we’re counting, we’re not really looking at birds. I’m not a counter. I’m not even a photographer. I look at birds.”

What's that bird got in its bill? On eBird, breeding codes have the answer(s)



Chuck Hundertmark

I begin to notice them each year toward the end of June — small splotches of white on driveways and sidewalks as I walk my neighborhood. These streaky smears have directionality, each fanning out from a single point. Over time, as more of them appear, they all seem to point in the same general direction.

Maybe you have seen them, too, and wondered: Bird droppings?

They *are* droppings — but not the kind you'd expect. Nor are they a random, year-round thing. Experienced birders know them as the contents of infant [fecal sacs](#), dropped by flying adult birds like bombs from miniature warplanes. They are not weaponry, though. They are the result of good nest keeping by diligent avian parents.

Nestlings of many bird species, particularly passerines, pass their waste in self-contained mucous membranes. The parents remove these fecal sacs from the nest to keep things sanitary as their bird babies grow. This frequent cleaning behavior also reduces the chance of detection by predators; nests not caked with white excrement are less visible.

So when you see an adult bird flying during nesting season with something white in its bill, chances are good it's a fecal sac. Birders who volunteered for the second Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas project (2007-2012) learned to record that behavior in their logs as "FS" — short for "carrying a fecal sac." It is one of nearly two dozen breeding bird codes used to record key observations and behaviors in breeding season.

But you don't have to be an atlas veteran or bird behavior expert to use these codes. If you report the results of your outings in eBird, breeding codes are built right in, waiting for you to use. In doing so, you not only enhance the value of your reports, but you also add understanding to your observations and fun to your birding. Call it better birding through breeding codes.

Importantly, these codes also document behaviors that may indicate the bird you see is a local breeder. As the name implies, we use them only during the breeding season. For some species, of course, the season may be nearly year-round, as for Rock Pigeon or Red Crossbill. For most, however, the season is limited to some part of spring and summer.

What are breeding behaviors? They range from simple to sublime. A bird being present in the right habitat for that species in breeding season. Chicks in the nest. Males singing and other courtship behavior. Nest building. Displays to distract potential predators away from a nest (Killdeer, for instance, do that). The presence of fledged young. For all those breeding behaviors and more, conscientious birders record them with letter codes.

Breeding bird atlases use volunteers (birders, generally) to document and map the geographic distribution of all bird species that breed in a defined area, often across an entire state. As participants gain more experience at finding evidence of breeding, this

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Bluebird, Mountain *Sialia currucoides*

2 Bluebird, Western *Sialia mexicana* [Hide Details](#) [Change Species](#)

Details: [X](#)

Media: [Learn more](#) [X](#)

Breeding: ☒ Choose the highest possible code... [Help...](#)

Add data...

- NY Nest with Young
- NE Nest with Eggs
- FS Carrying Fecal Sac
- FY Feeding Young
- CF Carrying Food
- FL Recently Fledged Young**
- ON Occupied Nest
- UN Used Nest (enter 0 if no birds seen)
- DD Distraction Display
- NB Nest Building
- CN Carrying Nesting Material
- PE Physiological Evidence
- B Woodpecker/Wren Nest Building
- A Agitated Behavior
- N Visiting Probable Nest Site
- C Courtship, Display, or Copulation
- T Territorial Defense
- P Pair in Suitable Habitat
- M Multiple (7+) Singing Birds
- S7 Singing Bird Present 7+ days
- S Singing Bird
- H In Appropriate Habitat
- F Flyover

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

Bunting, Indigo *Passerina cyanea*

Bunting, Lazuli *Passerina amoena*

Bunting, Lazuli *Passerina amoena*

Bunting, Lazuli *Passerina amoena*

Bunting, Lazuli *Passerina amoena*

Bunting, Lazuli *Passerina amoena*

Bushtit *Psaltriparus plumbeus*

Buteo sp. *Buteo*

Buteo/eagle *Buteo*

Catbird, Gray *Parus carolinensis*

Catharus sp. *Catharus*

Chat, Yellow *Geothlypis trichas*

Chickadee, Black-capped/Mountain *Parus atricapillus/gambeli*

Chickadee, Mountain *Parus gambeli*

List of breeding codes on eBird

field pursuit can become quite addicting. These “atlasers” grow attuned to watching bird behavior more keenly. They notice what some birds are picking up or carrying in flight, like nesting material, food . . and yes, those fecal sacs.

Whether you’re a veteran atlaser or simply a birder wanting to up your game, eBird encourages you to use breeding codes on your checklists. If you use the eBird mobile app, when you enter a species, clicking on the species name will open a screen where you provide breeding details.

Selecting “Breeding code” on that screen opens a menu of codes to choose. If you found a nest with eggs, for instance, you’ll select “NE Nest with eggs.” You can also add more details under “Comments.” For that nest, for example, perhaps you’ll add what species of tree or other description about where you found the nest, how high up the nest was, and how many eggs were in it. The more information you provide, the more useful your report will be for bird researchers. You may even find what you reported of use to yourself years from now.

Ready to become a better birder and take yourself more deeply into the world of birds? Paying more attention to breeding behavior is a great way to start. And there’s one more good reason to use breeding codes: Anecdotally, many birds appear to be breeding earlier in the year, perhaps because of changing climate. Entering breeding codes in your eBird reports may help researchers monitor such trends.

For more information on breeding codes, click “Help” at the top of the eBird website home page. Then look under the “eBird Next Steps” category — or just type “eBird Breeding and Behavior Codes” into the Help Center search box.



BIRDING ESSAY

The Towhee's Lesson in Noticing

*Editor's note: DFO member **Jared Del Rosso** is a contributor to the **Center for Humans and Nature**. This is an adaptation of an essay, first published in March on the Center's City Creatures Blog, a storytelling community at [humansandnature.org](https://www.humansandnature.org). To read Jared's original essay in its entirety, go to this link: <https://www.humansandnature.org/the-towhees-lesson-in-noticing>*

Jared Del Rosso

Although their songs and calls are better known, birds fill the world with other sounds. It is for this reason, and also because many birds would rather be heard than seen, that the artist and author **Jenny Odell** considers bird-watching a peculiar name for the activity she calls bird-noticing. After all, “half if not more of bird-watching is actually bird-listening,” Odell writes in *How to Do Nothing*.

In fact, birds use their bodies as instruments to make an array of non-vocal sounds. Taking flight in alarm, Rock Doves (aka pigeons) clap their wings, sending a cascade of snaps through a flock. Mourning Doves seem to whistle when taking flight, though they, too, can clap. The wing feathers of male American Woodcocks and the tail feathers of male Wilson's Snipes are shaped for the displays each species makes in spring: brazen flights over territories, with otherworldly howls of wind passing through their feathers. A male Common Nighthawk, diving aggressively near his territory, surrenders to gravity and manipulates the airflow by flexing his wings. The resulting boom sounds as if he's splitting the atmosphere itself.

Listen and you can hear air through the feathers of even the smallest birds, as the wings of many male hummingbirds buzz and hum. Here in Denver, I am finally sure of spring when I hear male Broad-tailed Hummingbirds fill afternoons with the insect-like trill of their flight.

Before the hummingbirds arrive, resident woodpeckers begin drumming. In Denver, the percussions of Northern Flickers chase away winter — bass drums on hollowed cottonwoods, snare drums on the gutters of our roofs. Meanwhile, the rat-a-tat drumming of a male Downy Woodpecker on a telephone pole in my backyard is a worthy complement to the flickers' heavy metal.

Other sounds, and the sort that draw me in most, are less adaptive, less intended. They are not signs to protect territories and call to potential mates. They are simply the sounds of birds as they live their lives in their chosen habitats.

When cattail marshes dry up in autumn, Red-winged Blackbirds, noisy and vocal enough to begin with, seem to grow in size and weight. Their invisible movements through the reeds are loud — loud enough that I have thought I was hearing a muskrat, a coyote or some other marsh animal trampling through. (I suspect that a coyote is much quieter in a marsh than is a single Red-winged Blackbird.) Similarly, American Robins sound heavy as a squirrel in the autumn, inspecting the newly fallen leaf litter for food.

Of all the autumn bird sounds, those of Spotted Towhees are most singular. Indeed, the sound of their scratches in newly dropped leaves could be considered field marks for the species. During Denver's winter, no other ground feeder — not the

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numerous Dark-eyed Juncos that arrive in Colorado in late autumn, nor the robins — makes a sound that can be mistaken for that of a Spotted Towhee.

This large sparrow, the western counterpart to the closely related Eastern Towhee, is the only year-round, backyard sparrow in most of Denver and its suburbs. Almost anywhere with undergrowth and leaf litter — that is, wherever a landscaper tolerates disorder — Spotted Towhees may hide.

Visually, they are striking studies in the use of color. In males, black heads and backs contrast with white spots and bellies; this contrast is slightly less marked in females, whose black feathers appear more washed out. Rusty flanks soften the contrast in both, and deep red eyes add energy to their physical composition. As striking as they are, Spotted Towhees are difficult to photograph without pulling the life and vibrancy out of them. So much of their character exists in sounds and movements that in photographs, Spotted Towhees look to me like stuffed specimens frozen in pose.

Vocally, the species is a combination of harsh mews, soft calls and, from the male's beak, a song of rings and rattles. In breeding season, the male Spotted Towhee takes all kinds of risks in his backyard territories, given the predatory presence of Cooper's Hawks and outdoor cats. He boldly sings from exposed perches. He chases away other males by working the edges of backyard habitats. Taking positions on low branches, telephone wires, and fences, he raises and flashes his long, white-edged tail. When his competitor retreats, he sings again.

It is the towhee's way of feeding, though, that produces its singular sound. Spotted Towhees seek seeds and small insects by standing in place, kicking both legs back, and scratching the ground. They do this "double-scratch" repetitively, clearing away debris that might hide food. In my yard, I've noticed small impressions that Spotted Towhees have left in piles of mulch, displacing wood chips in the process.

Most of the year, neither the action nor the sound of double-scratching tells birders they are in the presence of Spotted Towhees. Other sparrows, including similarly sized Green-tailed Towhees that migrate through Denver in spring and fall, also feed this way. (This is nicely captured in [a video by Timothy Barksdale](#), which shows both a Spotted Towhee and a White-throated Sparrow scratching for feed in snow.) Because no other similarly sized sparrow typically remains in Denver through late fall and winter, the sound of double-scratching in crisp, newly fallen leaf litter gives away the bird. Good thing, too, for those hoping to encounter a Spotted Towhee. In fall and winter, the birds are less vocal, bold, and conspicuous than in spring. They're often content to seek food deep in the underbrush, where they disappear into the tangle and shadows.

What does double-scratching in leaf litter sound like? "Rustle" comes to mind, but that could apply equally to the sounds of Song Sparrows at the overgrown edges of water, robins in the same leaf litter as towhees, rodents scurrying beneath grass, and even earthworms pulling leaves into their burrows. **Jack Gedney**, in a [lovely essay on towhees](#), calls it "The Big Rustle"

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to distinguish their rustle from others. To my ears, other birds make exploratory moves in leaf litter; a haphazard path of rustles trails them. Spotted Towhees, by contrast, often find a spot and just keep scratching. A series of scratches, in orderly succession, sends leaves flying. Pauses interrupt the series, as the towhee inspects its work.

Here in Centennial, I have lived with families of Spotted Towhees for five years now. I have stumbled upon a female as she incubated eggs behind my garden box. I have watched adults feed young, sometimes their own and sometimes those of Brown-headed Cowbirds that parasitize towhee nests. Certainly, I've heard the towhee rustle before. But like all living things, Spotted Towhees are worth noticing, again and again. Only recently, over the past few months, have I thought to *listen* to the sounds they give off while kicking leaves, recognizing I was in the presence of the bird.

This distinction — between hearing and listening — is slight, like that between seeing and watching. Hearing is passive, unintentional, and brief, as when one's eyes catch an animal darting through the field of vision, a blur of feathers or fur. One may hear a bird's call or song in the same way. Passing a tangle of brush while birding, I have often heard the male Spotted Towhee's song. Usually, I merely acknowledge him, add his name to the outing's list of birds and move on. He is expected, after all. Common, by the standards of birding here.

By contrast, the components of *bird-noticing* — watching and listening — are active, intentional, and patient. By softening attention, one attends to a bird beyond the field marks in the field guides. By sustaining attention, one stays with birds even after they've been identified. With time, the birds might offer more of their selves and their ways of being in the world to observers who take notice.

Jared Del Rosso is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Denver. Among many other things, he teaches courses on urban wildlife. He is an avid birder, a volunteer with the High Line Canal Conservancy, and a semi-professional woolgatherer.

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CONSERVATION

12 Tips for '21: Feeding our feathered friends . . . with the bugs and bounty of our own yards

Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. 12 for '21 aims to tell readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily activities. Look for more each month throughout 2021.

Tina Jones

Right now, birds need our help more than ever. After receiving so much joy from watching them, it is time for me to give back. How about you? Birding is a two-way experience. As we learned from the journal *Science* in 2019 about the [loss of 3 billion birds since 1970](#), their numbers are dropping, and they can use help from us humans.

If you have a yard, creating a habitat for birds can be a very helpful start. The elements of habitat are varied: bird-friendly plants, natural cover, supplemental feeding with bird seed, reliable water sources, and nesting boxes, to name just five. Take that last one: Consider putting up a nest box in a shaded location. If you're looking to attract small native passerines like chickadees, make sure the size of the entrance hole is just enough to invite them in and keep larger non-natives out.

You don't need a vast yard, either. You do need the right kinds of plants to attract them. (More on that shortly, and in the lists of plants and resources in the related "sidebar" that accompanies this article.) In fact, a townhouse, condominium, apartment, or small yard can still provide habitat. A spot on your apartment or condo balcony or townhouse porch with native plantings in a couple of containers may be all you need. In the garden, planting with layered or different heights of plants can entice birds into your spot, too.

If you do have yard space, a combination of bird-friendly shrubs, perennial plants, wildflowers and grasses, and a conifer or two adds variety to your yard and gives birds more natural

food choices. Native plants that evolved over thousands of years in ecosystems like Colorado's mountains and plains generally are much better than ornamental non-natives brought in from outside.

A good source for initial help is *The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds*, by **Stephen Kress**. Audubon, in fact, has native-plant websites and local "Habitat Hero" programs, workshops and webinars to get you started. For me, another must-read is **Douglas Tallamy's** *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*. As an entomologist, Tallamy reminds us that we can't have birds without insects. Adult birds may come to your seed feeder to eat, but more than 90 percent of land birds feed insects to their young. We need insects in our yards, whether caterpillars from butterflies and moths in summer or grubs hiding under leaf litter in winter (where resourceful birds will scratch around and find them).

And that brings us back to plants. The ones you provide *do* make a difference. Native plants have evolved together with native insects that Colorado birds crave and need. Caterpillars (a high-protein food source that birds feed their nestlings) are plant species-specific, meaning they evolved with certain plants on which butterflies and moths lay their eggs. The same is true for other insect species. And yet, for years, many nurseries have sold non-native plants labeled "insect-proof" because they are selectively bred not to attract bugs. That means birds get little or no benefit from them.

I have lived at the same address in Littleton since 1991, and I had many more insect "problems" when I first began to garden here. I used to worry when I found aphids on some of my plants. To repel them, I used Safer, an insect-killing soap nontoxic to birds, pets and people. But after putting up nest boxes for Black-capped Chickadees and House Wrens, the birds began to eat my insects, and I have not had a bad problem in years. Now when I see a little leaf damage, I know that soon I'll see chickadees unfurling those leaves to get the aphids inside. In my garden, I no longer regard insects as pests — they are bird food.

If you've got bugs, look into the concept of [Integrated Pest Management](#), IPM for short, to manage harmful or damaging insects at acceptable levels. They'll still be around, but in far fewer numbers — and they'll be food for your birds. The

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American Goldfinch and sunflowers
Jim Esten

goal is to use less toxic biological controls and only move on to “traditional” synthetic insecticides when absolutely necessary.

It’s no coincidence that, like birds, insect species and numbers have been dropping for years, too. Birds eat insects. Less to eat? Fewer birds. One reason for the insect decline may be the rise and persistence of insecticides. I even notice the difference driving on highways, especially in the country — fewer insects hitting my windshield than years ago.

In the meantime, get to know your local environment before you plant. Here in Denver and the Front Range, we get just 12-14 inches of precipitation a year, and drought is a frequent visitor. On the USDA’s [plant-hardiness map](#), we live in Zone 5, with winter cold down to minus-20 degrees. Choose plants accordingly for water and cold tolerance. Plan for plants that bloom from spring to fall, too, to attract a greater variety of birds, including seasonal migrants that might drop in.

When you’re ready to shop for native plants, you’ll be in luck. They are far more available than when I started. In the early 1990s, the only ones I could find were primarily for Colorado’s Western Slope. With more public interest and demand, plant nurseries became more aware. You can even buy native plants by mail order.

If you’re headed for the nursery, it helps to do some homework in books or online about what kinds of plants you’re after. You also might take along a list of their Latin or scientific names. Even with my personal background in botany, buying plants can be confusing, and garden center staff use common names a lot. When you ask for a plant by its common name, you might be shown two or three different-looking plants. Which is it? For instance, there are several different plants in Europe called Lupine, but they all look different — because they are different species. So, buyer beware — and bring a list of scientific names to compare to what’s on the label.

In the end, it takes time to see what birds may show up in your yard, and they may be totally different than those in someone else’s yard. Introducing native and bird-friendly plants may best be done one step at a time. Consider starting with plants in containers before converting an entire garden bed or removing a large area of lawn.

Whatever approach you take, you’ll know the birds are thanking you when they begin to show up and hang out, feed and perhaps even breed in your yard.

Native plants + resources: Some selective lists

Tina Jones

There are scores of plants, wildflowers, shrubs and trees native to Colorado and the former prairie landscape along the Front Range that attract birds. And there are dozens of resources for bird-minded gardeners to get more information and advice to plant natives for the benefit of our feathered friends. Here are a few of each.

Bird-friendly plants

This includes plants that I have seen birds feeding upon. When involved years ago with the Denver Museum of Nature & Science’s *Urban Wildlife* book, I watched what plants specific bird species fed on in the wild, and many were non-native weeds! For this reason, I believe we can and should leave a few weeds in our yards. Sparrows and juncos, for instance, feed on **Knotweed** (*Polygonum aviculare*) in fall and winter.

Ask your nursery about soil, water, and sun exposure. If you don’t have room for garden plantings, consider native annuals for balconies or patio containers. Among them are **Red Salvia** (*salvia coccinea*), **Cosmos**, and Colorado’s native annual **Sunflower** (*Helianthus annuus*).

Some top recommendations for native perennial plants and wildflowers:

- **Blanketflower** (*Gaillardia aristata*)
- **Goldenrod** (*Solidago canadensis*)
- **Cutleaf Coneflower** (*Rudbeckia laciniata*)
- **Prairie Coneflower** (*Ratibida columnifera*)
- **Blue sage** (*Salvia azurea*)
- **Rocky Mountain Penstemon** (*Penstemon strictus*)
- **Whipple’s Penstemon** (*Penstemon whippleanus*)

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Some examples of native shrubs:

- **Rabbitbrush** (*Ericameria nauseosa*)
- **Smith Buckthorn** (*Rhamnus smithii*)
- **Fendler's Barberry** (*Berberis fendleri*)
- **Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)
- **Golden Currant** (*Ribes aureum*)
- **Oregon Grape** (*Mahonia repens*)
- **Chokecherry** (*Prunus virginiana*)

Resources

Organizations, centers and other sources of native plant information:

- **Colorado Native Plant Society** (<https://www.conps.org>)
Native perennials and annuals, shrubs, grasses, trees. Native plant sales, garden certification, factsheets, garden design plans.
- **Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center** (<https://www.wildflower.org>)
Botanic Garden and Arboretum of Texas, spring native plant sales, online programs, magazine, native plant lists and more
- **High Plains Environmental Center** (<https://www.suburbitat.org>)
Longmont-based source of Colorado native plants (plant sale online through September 6), demonstration garden, public programs
- **High Country Gardens** (<https://www.highcountrygardens.com>)
New Mexico nursery/online mail order source of xeric natural plants, many suitable to Colorado Front Range and beyond
- **CSU Extension Service** (<https://www.extension.colostate.edu>)
Numerous free native plant handouts, low-water plant lists, referrals and contacts for advice from Colorado county horticultural agents
- **Homegrown National Park** (www.homegrownnationalpark.org)
Website/blog of native plant authority/entomologist **Douglas Tallamy**, author of *Bringing Nature Home*. Book and website emphasize importance of native insects/plants in life cycle of songbirds
- **Prairie Moon Nursery** (<https://www.prairiemoon.com>)
Minnesota-based nursery with national online supply lines, popular catalog of numerous native plants, most from Midwest and eastern Great Plains but also Colorado-appropriate natives
- **Front Range Wild Ones** (<https://frontrangewildones.org/>)
Volunteer education and advocacy membership group for restoration of natural-plant landscapes
- **Audubon Rockies Habitat Hero** (<https://rockies.audubon.org/habitat-hero>)
Native-plant education program, events, workshops, designs, resources. (**Denver Audubon** also has a Habitat Hero-designated demonstration garden at the **Chatfield Audubon Nature Center**, <https://denveraudubon.org/nature-center/>)

A few Colorado nurseries and seed companies that feature native plants:

- **Chelsea Nursery** (<https://chelseanursery.com>)
- **Echter's Nursery** (<https://echters.com>)
- **Fort Collins Nursery** (<https://fortcollinsnursery.com>)
- **Harlequin's Garden** (<https://harlequinsgardens.com>)
- **O'Tooles Garden Center** (<https://otoolesgardencenters.com>)
- **Tagawa Gardens** (<https://tagawagardens.com>)
- **Pawnee Buttes Seed Co.** (<https://pawneebuttesseed.com>)
- **Southwest Seed** (<https://southwestseed.com>)

Volunteer Here!

... because DFO needs you

Sharon Tinianow

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization, and we need more members to step up and join the fun. This regular feature in the newsletter will share ways for you to get active with DFO, from one-time opportunities to committee leadership.

If you have skills worth sharing with DFO, we welcome you to contact us. Let's talk about where you'd like to get involved. For starters, there are two ways to tell us you're interested: contact me, DFO Vice President **Sharon Tinianow**, by email at sharontinianow@gmail.com, or fill out the volunteer interest form on the [DFO website](#).

If you want to help, here are a few volunteer opportunities to consider.

One-time events

- Help staff the DFO booth at Cherry Creek State Park on June 12 for a special event. We are looking for a few people to take a shift of 1-2 hours. Training will be provided on the day of the event. You will greet people, answer questions about DFO, and pass out membership information.
- The DFO Members Only Picnic, traditionally held each June, is being moved to the fall this year. It's a fun way to recognize and appreciate DFO members. There's a variety of volunteer roles, from flipping burgers and brats the day of the event to helping with pre-picnic planning between June and September. There is lots of room for creativity in shaping this annual event.

Club committee work

- Now that DFO field trips are back, we need two more field trip schedulers. Training will be provided by **Karen von Saltza** and **Gregg Goodrich** of the DFO Field Trip Committee. Each trip scheduler is responsible for one month at a time in rotation with the others. Trip leaders

submit details for their outings to the schedulers, who also keep track of whether more trips are needed and whether the mix of monthly trips needs tweaking. This is a great role for anyone familiar with DFO's field trips.

- DFO monthly evening programs are on our usual summer break until late August. Once they resume, the Communication and Outreach (C&O) Committee will need another person to help promote programs to our members and the community at large. This is a great role for someone who enjoys putting together information and images to make an attractive and informative promotional piece. If you are comfortable using Word, sending emails with attachments and posting to Facebook, this is a creative and enjoyable job to take on.
- The C&O committee is also looking for help with the "O" part of our work — outreach. Do you have ideas about how we can touch new audiences through participation in public events and festivals? Are you willing to write articles for neighborhood newsletters or explore community websites where we can promote our events for free? If so, please join the C&O committee. It meets just four times a year to brainstorm, discuss and plan. We'd love to have you join us.

That's this month's **Volunteer Here!** Watch for more opportunities and appeals in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Welcome to new DFO members

Audrey Boag of Indian Hills; Gary Brower, Englewood; Georgia Garnsey, Denver; Sharon Hines, Castle Rock; Patty Jaacks, Centennial; Sue Kiernan, Greenwood Village; Lynda Kithil, Louisville; Robin McDougal, Denver; Patrick Oakes, Westminster; Cedric Pereira, Denver; Daren Seex, Parker; Laurel Starr, Golden; Angela Trnka, Littleton, and Jennifer Wallace, Byers

Thank you for your contributions

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Georgia Garnsey, and Sharon Hines

Friends of DFO

Robin McDougal

Follow the North Star . . . and find a helpful DFO birder in the spotlight

Patrick O'Driscoll

Denver Field Ornithologists get requests from time to time to offer birding expertise in the community. One such request came recently via an email to the DFO website from a reporter for *The Denver North Star*, a community newspaper delivered monthly to 30,000 households and businesses in the northwest quadrant of Denver.

"I am writing a seasonal story about what urban bird lovers (especially newer ones as a result of the pandemic) can expect in the Spring," reporter **Kathryn White** wrote to DFO on March 22. "This piece is a great opportunity to feature a local ornithologist or two. Do you have connections in NW Denver? I would love to include them and your organization in this piece."

DFO's reply: Can do! Less than three hours after White's request, DFO's volunteer webpage and outreach team had put White in touch with DFO Instagram maven and master birder **Megan Miller**. Within about three weeks, White's article featuring Miller's words of bird-watching enlightenment for *North Star* readers went live on the newspaper's website. Home delivery of the printed paper followed days later, with the birding article — headlined "Spring: Set Out to Enjoy the Birds" — at the top of page 1.

Miller delivered, too, with timely tips and advice for novice birders in an easy-going, non-threatening fashion. The article also put in a plug for *let's go birding*, the quirky and informative YouTube series of Front Range birding adventures created a year ago by Miller, her partner **Jordan Spalding**, and their friend **Satoshi Machihara**.

To read the whole story, go to this link at *The Denver North Star*:
<https://www.denvernorthstar.com/spring-set-out-to-enjoy-the-birds/>

"Many thanks to Megan for this great bit of outreach! And to (DFO president-elect) **Susan Blansett** for her quick thinking when the email arrived," said **Sharon Tinianow**, DFO vice president-elect and chair of the club's Communication & Outreach Committee.





Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDS.ORG

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As outings return,
mother of modern
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BIRDING FOR GOOD

"Green Big Day" boosts
fund in Joe Roller's name

CONSERVATION

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B-T Hummingbird
needs our help now

IN MEMORIAM

Bonnie Boex, bonny
bluebird lady of Dillon

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Yellow Grosbeak

📷 Ken Stuckey

📍 Gib Rokich residence
Huerfano County, CO





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Murder of crows? Gulp of swallows? How about a bounty of birding media?

Susan Blansett

Is it just me, or has the incidence of TV, radio, print and online media devoted to birding ballooned in the past year? Every time I turn around, I'm surprised and delighted to see or hear another foray into things birdy. The other day, it was a public-radio interview with author **Margaret Atwood** about her longtime joy in birding with her late partner, **Graeme Gibson**, and the reissue of his *The Bedside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany* (with a new foreword by Atwood).

Maybe it's just my heightened awareness during spring migration, or because birding is still one of the fastest-growing hobbies (for some literally a sport) in North America. The trend evidently persisted during the pandemic, when so many were looking for any activity that would get them out of the house, and still be safe.

Until a few months ago, my consumption of birding media was limited mostly to books (**Kenn Kaufmann's** *Kingbird Highway* remains my fave), magazines like *Bird Watcher's Digest* and *Living Bird*, social media and programs offered by DFO, Audubon or PBS. Then one morning, my yearning for something to listen to on a long walk with my dog sent me searching. I tuned in to the American Birding Association's *American Birding Podcast*, hosted by **Nate Swick**. Wow! What a delight to hear Nate and **Ted Floyd** comparing notes about the birds they were seeing and hearing in their respective home patches, Nate's in North Carolina and Ted's here in Colorado. I was hooked. Nate has a rare talent for showcasing his guests in a laid-back way that pulls great information to the front, whether the topic is birds and birding, travel, conservation or birding ethics. I've enjoyed every episode, some more than once.

During spring migration, I turn off the podcasts and tune in to birdsong on dog walks. But I plug back in for inspiration when ruthlessly beating back the bindweed, invasive yarrow and thistles in my garden like Indiana Jones hacking through the jungle. Here are a few other birding podcasts I've enjoyed lately:

- *On Word for Wildlife*, with **Tykee James**, Wildlife Observer Network — One of the founders of Black Birders Week, Tykee often dives into policy and politics around birding

and conservation. His interesting lineup of guests is not bird-exclusive but always touches on conservation

- *Birding Tools*, with **Christa Rolls** — Good, basic tips and tricks for novices and those just starting to hit their birding stride. Each podcast is clearly titled so it's easy to find topics that interest you
- *The Science of Birds*, with **Ivan Phillipsen** — If you like to nerd out on science, you'll LOVE this podcast, and the rest of us will from time to time. It's also a blog, so you can listen or read at www.scienceofbirds.com
- *Bird Sh*t*, with millennials **Mo** and **Sarah** — NOT for you if you wince at profanity, but a very casual, fast-paced romp through cool facts about birds, with interesting interviews. They rate themselves R for "Ridiculously LOLOLOL-worthy"

And of course, when I'm at my computer screen and NOT at work, I thoroughly enjoy the *let's go birding* YouTube channel of video guides produced and hosted by DFO's own **Megan Miller** and partner **Jordan Spalding**. If you haven't checked them out yet, go to the DFO homepage and scroll down to the yellow block, then click on "Explore Birding." That takes you to our "Birding the Denver Area" page. Now, under "Resources for Birders," click EXPLORE and their entire series is at your fingertips. (I checked out their video on Lower Latham Reservoir before heading up to Weld County last Saturday. Great stuff!)

There are SO many other birding media sites I haven't had time to check out yet. So, what's YOUR favorite birding media? Got a recommendation? Let me know! Click on the "Contact Us" form at the bottom of the DFO homepage at <https://dfobirds.org/> to share, whether it's a book, a documentary, YouTube channel, podcast, whatever.

Until next time, see you in the field — literally! I'll be on one or more of our DFO field trips now that we are FULLY OPEN . . . woohoo!

— Susan

FIELD TRIPS

DFO Board lifts field trip restrictions as coronavirus immunity rises

Patrick O'Driscoll

One month into Denver Field Ornithologists' limited return to in-person field trips, the DFO Board of Directors has voted to restore trip practices in effect before the rise of the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 forced the club to suspend group birding outings indefinitely.

By unanimous vote at its quarterly meeting May 24, the board "hereby rescinds all previous restrictions on field trips (first voted March 13, 2020 and periodically renewed into 2021), subject to state and local health guidelines." This means no more 6-person limit on the number of trip participants and a return to carpooling for outings longer and farther afield than ordinary local meet-ups.

Two days after the board action, the DFO Field Trip Committee discussed how to resume club field trips. The committee strongly recommends that all participants and trip leaders get vaccinated against the coronavirus and continue to follow commonsense precautions if and whenever necessary, including social distancing and mask-wearing when in close quarters.

"The Field Trip Committee advises field trip leaders that they may resume field trips with no restrictions, at their own discretion," said an email letter sent to all trip leaders by DFO Field Trip Chair **Karen von Saltza**. The letter said the committee "strongly recommends that field trip participants and leaders be vaccinated; and that limits on number of cars on long trips may be increased to accommodate participants who do not wish to travel with others."

These actions followed the recent and dramatic reduction in state and local Covid-related restrictions on group gatherings as vaccinations have risen and the pandemic has eased. Previously, the state had limited "guided outdoor activities" such as field trips to no more than 50 percent of "normal capacity." In DFO's case, a normal or average field trip limit before the pandemic was 12 people; thus, half of that led to the six-person limit.

"I'm thrilled," von Saltza said. "I think we did the right thing by closing down. But that was hard. People have called me, asking, 'Are you ever going to start field trips again?' I said, 'Of course we are, but we've got to be safe.' From the start, everybody at DFO said, 'Let's do this the right way.'"

As before, registration for all field trips is on the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>. In a new and additional step created during the Covid-19 hiatus, DFO has revised and rewritten the field trip liability waiver to require a one-time, online signature before trip participants can sign up. The process is simple and will automatically appear on the screen when you log onto the website to register. This new step takes the place of the manual signature once required of participants on a paper sign-up sheet at the start of DFO field trips.



DFO NEWS

The mother of modern DFO field trips retires

Patrick O'Driscoll

Veteran Colorado birder **Karen von Saltza**, who helped usher Denver Field Ornithologists field trips into the computer age to flourish as a model program of free birding outings, has retired from her volunteer role in the club.

Von Saltza, who also led efforts to set trip leadership standards and train dozens of competent, skilled DFO trip leaders, resigned effective May 31 after almost a decade as director of field trips and leader development. "I was going to resign last Christmastime," said Karen, whose struggle with serious vertigo because of an inner-ear disorder has made leading or going on field trips impossible now. "But I wanted to get us through the Covid-19 pandemic and back to starting up field trips again. I've done that now. That gave me permission to leave. It's time."

A DFO member since 1999, von Saltza was honored in 2018 with the Ptarmigan Award, the club's highest

Continued on page 4

honor, for contributions including her work to refine the field trip program and incorporate it into the club's revamped website. She also led a committee that included **Paul Slingsby** and **Mark Amershek**, among others, in creating the DFO Field Trip Leader Manual and establishing trip leader training and certification.

Under Karen's direction, trip participation went from just showing up unannounced at the trailhead to registering in advance easily and efficiently online. Working tirelessly with DFO website mavens **Kay Niyo** and **Ann Johnson**, she helped incorporate field trip management into the website and streamline signups while adding more trip destinations, web-based participant liability waivers, and at-a-glance details for each trip.

During von Saltza's tenure, DFO's field trip offerings also expanded dramatically from one or two a weekend to as many as several per week. It reached an apex during the club's communal "Big Year" in 2018 (coordinated by **David Suddjian**), when DFO conducted 230 trips, an average of nearly 20 per month or one trip every 1.6 days. Forty-two different leaders led trips across 54 of Colorado's 64 counties, both high-water marks for leader involvement and field trip reach.

A native of San Francisco, von Saltza spent most of her life in California before moving to Colorado in 1985 with her two sons and daughter. After four years in Boulder, she moved to Denver and, 24 years ago, to the southeast Denver townhouse where she hosted meetings of the DFO Field Trip Committee.

It was there, just across the Highline Canal Trail from Cherry Creek Country Club, that Karen's passion for birds was sparked. "When we moved out here, the birds were just everywhere," von Saltza recalled. The trigger was one of the first birds she noticed: "I saw it fly by. It was yellow. What IS this yellow bird? I wanted to know."

For the record, it was an American Goldfinch. Not knowing that at the time, she contacted Audubon of Greater Denver to find out more. That led her to enroll in Audubon's beginning birder class, led by longtime Colorado experts **Hugh** and **Urling Kingery**.

One other motivation stood out. Birding became a weekend refuge from a grueling, thankless day job. "I was an international corporate travel agent, working 50-60 hours a week," Karen explained. "I would come home just fried, wiped out on Friday night. But I would pack my lunch and pack my car and get up at 4 the next morning and go birding." Once she was outside, "I was *not* looking at my computer — I was looking at birds. I came back to work on Monday essentially as restored as I could be."

Von Saltza soon joined DFO, too, and "I went on as many field trips as I could. I loved the social aspect, and I'm an introvert. Field trips were fun." The path from voracious new birder to trip leader was longer. A couple of years after she first birded with the Kingerys, "Hugh asked me if I'd lead a trip. I said 'No, I'm nowhere near ready.'"

Fast-forward to 2006, when the Kingerys established Audubon Denver's Master Birding program — 12 months of study, lectures, field trips and testing. Von Saltza eagerly enrolled in the inaugural class and completed the arduous program. With that experience and expertise came mentoring of other master-birder students. Soon Karen was in charge of arranging the many field trips students would take through the demanding, year-long course.

After she retired from her day job in 2012, then-DFO president **Chuck Hundertmark** approached von Saltza about leading DFO field trips, improving trip leadership, and streamlining the cumbersome program. After begging off for a summer's break, she joined Hundertmark's team. There was much to be done.

"DFO used to be just this little club," she said. "You woke up on Saturday morning and if you felt like going birding, you'd just show up at the trip location." But that led to times when 30 people crowded in, overwhelming a single trip leader. Schedulers had to cajole leaders into setting up trips, a process von Saltza called "the beg-a-thon." Caravans for field trips out onto the Eastern Plains sometimes grew to more than a dozen vehicles, a logistics and safety nightmare. Shifting the program online would also mean training dozens of trip leaders who had limited computer experience.

But after nearly two years of work, the online system went live in summer 2014. DFO has ridden a wave of field trip and membership growth ever since. "We've gone through the hard part of shifting over all the improvements we needed to make," von Saltza said. "My work was to simplify the job for others. We got together often and we solved problems."

Von Saltza's departure leaves the field trip committee chair vacant. "The job now is not anywhere as onerous as it used to be," she said, describing the role more as "an administrative technician" supported by a committee of involved DFO veterans. In fact, the computer and website side of the job is facilitated by one of those committee members, **Gregg Goodrich**.

Karen admits that as head of field trips, birding became for her "more than just a hobby, it became a major function of my life — and I'll miss it."

And DFO will miss her.



Aves de Pura Vida: Birding in Costa Rica

Max Vindas
Monday, August 23, 2021
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

In Costa Rica, the words “Pura Vida” — literally “pure life” — are an all-purpose expression: both hello and goodbye, a toast, a cheer, a celebration, an attitude of acceptance. The phrase everywhere . . . and so are Costa Rica’s birds. Although less than one-fourth the size of Colorado, Costa Rica is home to more than 900 species — greater than in all 49 U.S. mainland states and Canada combined. And veteran birding guide **Max Vindas** has seen or heard most if not all of them.

Vindas, a senior naturalist guide for Horizontes Nature Tours, will lead participants in DFO’s Aug. 23 evening program through an exploration of birds in his country’s diverse and wide-ranging regions, from lowland rainforests on both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts to the dry, tropical forests of the northwest and the bird-rich highlands of the Talamancas Mountains in the south. With more than 20 years’ experience leading eco-tourism outings, he can easily identify species of flora and fauna from every corner of Costa Rica; he considers his keen sense of hearing and bird sound ID his biggest strength.

In addition to Costa Rica, Vindas has led birdwatching trips throughout Central America and Brazil for eco-tourism companies including National Geographic, Lindblad Expeditions and others.

An avid birder from childhood, he refined his skills while earning a bachelor’s degree in natural resources administration and management. He complements his guidework with lectures and has consulted for the Inter-American Development Bank and the state of Tocantins in Brazil, where he helped develop state parks in Cantão and Jalapão. He is widely published in Costa Rica and Brazil in sustainable tourism development.

Look for more details and a sign-up link for this Zoom presentation in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July–August and February–March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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A Green Big Year: My 2021 birding quest for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant

Scott Somershoe

Monday, September 27, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Mark your calendar now for this autumn evening program with DFO member **Scott Somershoe**, land birds coordinator for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. On Jan. 1, he embarked on his second "Green Big Year" — a self-powered, carbon-free quest to record as many species in Colorado as possible, but only on foot or bicycle from his home in Littleton. Aiming for at least 250 species this year (he found 244 in his year-long 2020 pursuit), Somershoe has already listed 181 species through the first few days of May 2021.

That number is important not just for the achievement, but because he is gathering per-species pledges and flat donations for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant for bird research in Colorado. Somershoe and Colorado Field Ornithologists established the fund in tribute to **Joe Roller**, the longtime Colorado ambassador for birding and member of both DFO and CFO, who died last November.

In September, Somershoe will tell the story of his Big Year so far, from planning and logistics to adventures and misadventures, "the birds, the bike routes, the people and the experiences." He said he set out to "honor Joe's legacy" — and he is finding that this "marathon effort is challenging in many ways . . . balancing being a husband, father of three, work, and my physical output."

Look for more details to sign up for this Zoom webinar presentation in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*. To follow Somershoe's Green Big Year endeavor until then, visit his Joe Roller Memorial Green Big Year blog at <https://jrmemorialgreenbigyear.blogspot.com/>.



An Evening with Nathan Pieplow

Nathan Pieplow

Monday, October 25, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

One of Colorado's foremost birders, **Nathan Pieplow** of Boulder, will be speak on an as-yet-to-be-decided birding topic at DFO's Oct. 25 meeting. A former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' Colorado Birds quarterly journal, he is the author of the two volumes of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* for both western and eastern North America.

Pieplow, a native of South Dakota, grew up fascinated by birds and has been an intense student of bird sounds for 18 years. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail](#) website.

Pieplow's day job is as an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. A man of multiple talents, he even dabbles in graphic design. He won the National Association of Science Writers contest last year to design its ScienceWriters2020 conference logo.

Look for more details and a link to register for his October presentation via Zoom webinar in upcoming issues of *The Lark Bunting*.



From “Crazy French” to Fishers Peak: Colorado’s newest state park

Crystal Dreiling

Monday, November 22, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Last October, Fishers Peak State Park became the newest of Colorado’s 42 state parks. Comprising dense, wildlife-rich forests, grasslands, foothills and mesas in the mountainous borderlands outside of Trinidad, the park opened last October in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with public access to only a tiny, 250-acre patch of its 19,200 total acres.

At the time, **Crystal Dreiling**, park manager of both Fishers Peak and nearby Trinidad Lake State Park, said the initial goal was “to give everyone a taste of the hiking, hunting, wildlife watching and more that will be available once the park is fully developed in coming years.” The southern Colorado park is the result of a partnership among the state, the Trust for Public Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the local Trinidad community, among others.

Join Dreiling in DFO’s final monthly evening program of 2021 to learn more about Fishers Peak SP’s origins (locals called it Crazy French Ranch), what’s open now and what’s ahead, and the new park’s prospects for birders (53 species in just 16 eBird reports from Fishers Peak’s Moore Canyon hotspot since May 2020).

Look for more details and a link to register for her Zoom presentation in upcoming issues of *The Lark Bunting*.



Pied-billed Grebe
Chuck Hundertmark

IN MEMORIAM

Lake Dillon's "bird lady": Bonnie Boex championed bluebirds

Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO member **Bonnie Boex**, a dedicated and passionate friend for decades to the bluebirds of Summit County's Lake Dillon, died unexpectedly on April 30 of severe injuries suffered in a southeast Denver car accident eight days earlier.

A longtime Dillon resident, Boex, 76, was known there as "the bird lady" for her tireless advocacy for feathered friends of all kinds — sick songbirds, wounded raptors, and the bluebirds, swallows and others that nested in dozens of nest boxes she built, installed, maintained, and protected for more than 30 years.

On daily walks from early spring through autumn, Boex (rhymes with "oaks") patrolled a trail of more than 50 bluebird boxes along Lake Dillon's northeastern shoreline. She kept detailed notes on nesting birds, checked the progress of eggs and young, captured close-ups of breeding pairs via remote camera, and tossed out countless handfuls of mealworms for her "blues" to feed their young.

"Bonnie was the best bluebird nest box monitor I have ever known," said fellow DFO member **Kevin Corwin**, a friend and mentor to Bonnie in the [Colorado Bluebird Project](#). "She had a personal relationship with every bird in every box on her trails. I miss her, and I know 'her' birds miss her."

At the time of her death, Corwin had been planning to meet with Boex to involve her with a nest box trail "down here" in the Denver area. Bonnie and her husband, **Ed Baker**, had met in Denver in the 1980s, and moved back to the city in 2019 after 30 years in Dillon. But Baker said she continued to drive back to Summit County weekly to help care for the birds. Her friend **Carolyn Tiller** had since taken over care of the trail, but last summer, "Bonnie was still ordering mealworms for the bluebirds and taking them up for Carolyn," he said. "She said, 'I'd hate to lose touch with them.' that's the way she was."

Corwin, a bluebird project volunteer and coordinator since 2003, said Boex "needed bluebirds as much as they needed her. Bonnie was like a momma tiger for her bluebirds." He recalled the time a few years ago when "she actually paid for necropsies to determine if an insect-spraying program had killed some of her birds." (Fortunately, it had not.)

Born Bonita Jean Smeester on July 25, 1944 in Green Bay, WI, she was one of five children (three girls, two boys) of **Cyril** and **Evelyn Smeester**. As a teen, Bonnie was a high school cheerleader for pro football's Green Bay Packers. "She would tell a story," Baker recalled, "about how she bumped into a player one day and fell into his lap." The player was young running back (and future NFL Hall of Famer) **Paul Hornung**.



Bonnie Boex
Matt Graves / mgravesphoto.com

Continued on page 9

Shortly after she married **Mike Boex**, the couple moved to Colorado, where he worked for Martin Marietta aerospace, now Lockheed Martin. They had a son, **Steven**, but divorced in the late 1970s. Bonnie went on to work as a bookkeeper and paralegal, and met Baker, a real estate developer, in an office building elevator. They moved to Summit County in 1983, where he was developing the Point Dillon real estate project, and married in Breckenridge in 1989.

“When Bonnie was very young, she always had a love of birds and animals, and felt that they were much more important to the world than people are,” Baker said. “She discovered bluebirds in our backyard, on the back fence.” Soon she joined the bluebird project, and the couple began building nest boxes. “When she decided to start a bluebird trail, she had to make friends with Denver Water, (which) owned the land all the way around the lake,” Denver’s largest storage reservoir.

Did she ever make friends! “The Denver Water Board people want to put up a plaque,” Baker said, “with her picture and some words on it, on the gate that goes out to Water Board Point,” where some of her nest boxes stand.

“Bonnie had the biggest heart of almost anyone I’ve known,” said Summit County friend **Lu Snyder**, who wrote Boex’s obituary and profiled her bluebird efforts four years ago in a *Breckenridge Magazine* feature.

“Every time she walked along the lake, she would come home with a handful of monofilament line, picked up on the shore,” her husband said. “She rescued a few birds over the years that had become entangled in that stuff.” Bonnie became known for rescuing injured birds of prey, and soon locals were bringing “the bird lady” other sick and injured birds.

Baker added that if Bonnie were alive now to hear talk of plaques and admiration, “she would say, ‘Oh, come on! I just do what I like to do.’ But it was a lot more than that. She gave a lot of people a lot of pleasure in those birds, along that trail, for a long, long time.”

All are welcome to a memorial gathering scheduled for Saturday, June 12, at 9 a.m. MDT in the Lake Dillon Amphitheatre. The family has asked that instead of flowers, memorial donations be made in the name of Bonnie Boex to the Colorado Bluebird Project. Full details are in Bonnie’s obituary at <https://www.monarchsociety.com/obituary/bonita-bonnie-boex>.



With one of her nestboxes
Matt Graves / mgravesphoto.com



One of Bonnie's Mountain Bluebirds
Bonnie Boex



Self-serve kiosk
Patrick O'Driscoll

COLORADO BIRDING

Birder-friendly Chico Basin Ranch: After 2024, will birding still be the same?

Patrick O'Driscoll and Roger Koester

The scene is set for the next chapter in the saga of one of Colorado's premier birding destinations. On May 12, the Colorado State Land Board unanimously approved a staff-recommended call for bids on the next cattle-ranching lease at state-owned Chico Basin Ranch.

Exceptional habitat has made the 86,000-acre ranch southeast of Colorado Springs a vital way station for migratory birds — and a magnetic attraction for birders up and down the Front Range. But a significant change in how non-ranching activities may be conducted there after 2024 could drastically alter or limit Chico Basin birding as we know it.

Under a single, 25-year lease held since 1999, the family-run [Ranchlands](#) livestock company has welcomed birders and other non-agricultural users onto Chico Basin's vast expanse of shortgrass prairie in El Paso and Pueblo counties. The company manages birding visits under an informal system of self-serve, "open gate" access, almost any day or time, for a modest daily fee (paid at a rustic wooden kiosk at ranch HQ), no reservation required.

The next ranching lease, however, will cover only the livestock and agriculture part. The State Land Board intends to split off management of all non-ranching activities into "layered" leases separate from the cattle operation. Those activities would include birding, a seasonal banding station run by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, other scientific research, hunting, and other pursuits.

Although Ranchlands is likely to be a frontrunner in bidding to renew its Chico Basin operation, the new lease will no longer allow it (or another cattle operator) to exercise the kind of [casual, benevolent oversight of birding](#) that Ranchlands has displayed.

The State Land Board and its staff plan to negotiate and oversee the non-ranching leases and activities directly — and "open gate" is not on the menu. "They don't want that any longer," said **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair of Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of the National Audubon Society. "They want to be in control."

Hodges, who has helped coordinate increased involvement of conservation organizations including DFO in the Chico Basin discussion, said access — how much and how often — is *the* issue. "My biggest concern is how much time they're going to allow us on the ranch. We're not in a place of power. We're the ones that are going to have to compromise on this."

What compromise looks like is just one of many unknowns at this stage. Might future birders need to make reservations? Would someone have to manage access through a locked gate? Would group visits like the field trips DFO leads at Chico Basin two or three times a year follow different rules? Who or what entity would hold a birding lease, carry liability insurance, schedule visitors, collect fees? Aiken Audubon? DFO? A coalition of groups? Could volunteer groups administer all that? Could they afford to?

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DFO Conservation Committee members at ranch, from left: Steve Ryder, Colleen Nunn, Roger Koester, Susan Blansett, Ian Redfield, Sharon Tinianow

CHICO BASIN *cont from page 10*

In previous conversations with land board staff, “I just mentioned that we’re not going to want birders out there in large numbers at any given time,” Hodges said — meaning that perhaps limiting the number of birders per day or season could be a tradeoff for more days, weeks and months that birders are allowed in. “More days of birding would be better than fewer.”

Hodges said a lot will depend on who wins the next ranching lease: “If Ranchlands stays on under a new lease, ranch manager **Duke Phillips IV** (son of Ranchlands founder **Duke Phillips III**) is not going to care if birders are out there all the time.” Hodges believes at least a couple of other prospective bidders for the ranch lease “would be amenable to having (birders) out there” on a regular basis. But any choice other than Ranchlands is likely an unknown quantity for now. “That’s what we have to see,” she added. “If there is a different rancher, is another rancher going to see us as a nuisance?”

Hodges said she has asked “Duke IV” if birders have done anything “problematic,” and “he just had no complaints. Overall, they’ve been very happy with us,” in part because “we stood up for trying to keep them on the ranch and promoting their good stewardship practices.”

The land board’s formal call for bids on the next ranch lease — known as an RFP, short for “Request for Proposals” — is not expected to happen until 2022 or 2023. The main ranching lease to be awarded through that process won’t take effect until Jan. 1, 2025, about 3-1/2 years from now.

The land board is required to manage state properties like Chico Basin for the financial benefit of Colorado’s public schools. So, it will solicit bids for revenue-producing leases in three functional categories at the ranch: agriculture (grazing and irrigated cropland), recreation (including hunting and fishing), and hospitality (including weddings and activities such as classes in ranch management, farm-to-table cooking, leather-working, photography and the like).

In an introduction to the RFP, one of several key priorities at Chico Basin is “facilitation” of scientific research. After public discussion and debate about this, the board staff has acknowledged bird watching as a scientific activity, not merely a recreational pursuit — given that birders share seasonal, numeric and species information about Chico Basin birds with the eBird international database through their checklists.

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CHICO BASIN RANCH



CHICO BASIN *cont from page 11*

“Scientific” classification for birding (as with the bird banding station and other research) means not revenue-producing, and thus, not subject to steeper, market-driven lease terms. But the land board itself would still negotiate on birding and other scientific activities “with qualified parties” under separate permits or leases.

DFO President **Susan Blansett** said the board staff’s “original inclination to profit from birding trips was unrealistic. Now that they realize that and have classified us as a scientific activity, our next goal will be to secure year-round access and not have the number of outings too limited to serve that scientific purpose.”

Blansett and members of DFO’s Conservation Committee toured Chico Basin last month. “We are happy to see the State Land Board recognize that birding is not a purely recreational activity, but also serves an important ‘citizen science’ role, especially as so many grassland species are facing declining numbers,” said committee chair **Steve Ryder**.

“I can now see why it’s so critical to maintain Chico as a viable sanctuary for migrating birds as well as resident species,” added committee member **Roger Koester**, on his first visit to the ranch. “Without flexibility similar to what we now have with Ranchlands, our ability as birders to further citizen science at Chico could well be in jeopardy.”

Hodges of Aiken Audubon, a DFO member herself, said the time to move forward is “once we know who the next (ranching) lessee is.” She suggested that birders and other interested individuals and groups “continually bring up their interest, our interest” with the land board “to keep it in the forefront” until then.

CHICO BASIN RANCH: IF YOU GO

Going birding at Chico Basin Ranch is refreshingly low-tech. After driving 17 miles east from the raceway exit off Interstate-25 south of Colorado Springs, visitors enter the ranch through a classic rustic gateway. Attached to the fence on either side are indicators that it’s not your usual cattle ranch. Signs mark Chico’s status as an “Outstanding Holistic Management Site,” an “Excellence in Range Management” awardee, and another stop along the “Colorado Birding Trail.”

Another 4-1/2 dirt-road miles south, birders reach ranch headquarters. At a shaded wooden kiosk there, they deposit their \$15-per-person daily fee (\$10 each for groups of four or more) in a wooden dropbox, grab a hand-drawn ranch map with birding areas highlighted (including the bird banding station and key ponds, meadows and groves) and set off.

<https://ranchlands.com/day-visits/birding-wildlife-viewing/>

Visitors observe a 25 mph speed limit on all ranch roads, whose dirt-and-gravel makeup can turn muddy, rutted or impassable in wet weather. For that reason, birders are advised to check the ranch website after major storms or check up updates from Colorado Springs birders via the [COBirds list-serv](#) of Colorado Field Ornithologists.

Heaviest visitation is during spring and fall migration, when the ranch is a vital stopover for avian travelers. The ranch’s astonishing list of 349 bird species recorded on the property makes Chico Basin Colorado’s top eBird hotspot.

“Green” Big Day boosts DFO pedaler’s year-long fundraising tribute to Joe Roller

*Editor’s note: On May 8, Denver Field Ornithologists member **Scott Somershoe** and former DFO field trip leader / board member **Chris Rurik** set off on bicycles on a “Green Big Day.” For the next 14 hours, propelled only by walking or pedaling, they listed as many bird species as they could. With each new one, they collected per-species pledge donations to a Colorado Field Ornithologists research grant fund named for the late **Joe Roller**, legendary Colorado birder, past DFO president, and friend to all. Here is the story of their day.*

Chris Rurik

Picture yourself on a dark road, through a dark valley. Long before first light, two birds call: Spotted Towhee first, then Red-winged Blackbird. Somewhere out there is a marsh. Over your shoulder, the moon just rose, a razor-edged C-shape over a black ridgeline. A motorcycle passes, trailing classic rock in the predawn darkness.

Scott Somershoe and I had already pedaled 8 miles since leaving his Littleton home at 3:30 a.m. At a deserted trailhead, we had stopped to hear a Common Poorwill’s weird call in the night. Then came something neither of us had ever heard: a Mountain Bluebird singing in the dark.

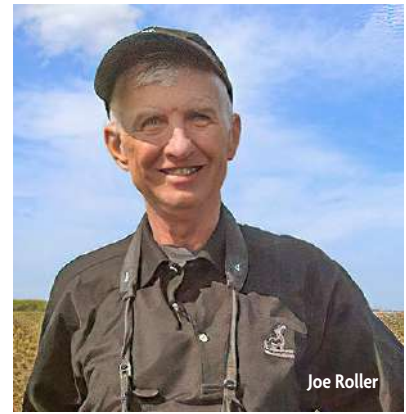
The unseen singer put us in a good mood. Scouting before the trip, Scott had found spring migration odd. Weather fluctuated, winds wouldn’t cooperate, and most species were a week or two late. Big days are hard enough to schedule. It’s trickier on a bike. You can’t just zip around collecting staked-out birds.

Other factors worked against us. The forecast was for 80 degrees. Scott, already 890 miles into the first four months of a **Joe Roller** Memorial Big Green Year, was having drive-train issues. He’d gone back to using an old chain. I was on a borrowed bike that hadn’t been ridden in several years. Its creaks and groans kept faking me out; they sounded like birds. Would our bikes hold up? Would we?

Climbing to our dawn spot, we locked the bikes and hiked. What a luxury — extensive open space a bike ride away. (Where I now live in Washington state, the roads are just too dangerous.) As light spilled over us, birds emerged: Swainson’s Thrush, Lark Sparrow, American Kestrel, Gray Catbird.

Our luck ran stronger. We heard Mountain Chickadee and Steller’s Jay, species we had marked down as unlikely. Above a chimney of rock, a Peregrine Falcon circled. The knife-winged flier was the ultimate good blessing: Joe loved Peregrines. Later, above a grassy draw, Scott caught the song of a Black-headed Grosbeak while I focused on a hunched, rock-like shape. Then it moved — a Wild Turkey. If you can believe it, the rarest bird we’d see all day.

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Tribute to Joe Roller

*Editor’s note: On hearing last November of Joe Roller’s passing, former DFO member **Chris Rurik** wrote this testimonial to his friend and birding mentor. We print it here on the occasion of Chris’s May 8 “Green Big Day” collaboration in Denver with DFO member Scott Somershoe as part of Scott’s “Green Big Year” on foot and bicycle to raise funds for Colorado Field Ornithologists’ Joe Roller Memorial Research Grant fund.*

We’ve lost a man who was larger than life, a true fountain of Colorado birding culture. My wife **Mimi** and I are so very sad to hear this news.

Instead of mentioning his top state list, Joe liked to tell people that he had the highest ratio of birding stories to birding skill in the state. Like many of his witticisms, that one took a minute to parse. Actually it took me years — I found such a claim doubtful coming from a guy with quite a bit of skill. Over time, though, I learned that he was right — he may have had a lot of skill, but he had infinitely more stories.

A story for every situation, a wit always ready. Reading back through our many emails has been highly entertaining. On the trips we did together, he’d be just as interested in the people around us as the birds.

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Blasting downhill and back to the suburbs, we paused at a park pond to add a rare Black Phoebe found nesting there for the past two years. The pond gave us our only Black-crowned Night-Heron of the day.

Gritting our teeth, we took on South Wadsworth Boulevard next, with trucks and a headwind from the south whipping us. My leg cramped. My spirit bent. Going half as fast as I should have, it was a low in a day-long string of lows and highs, body and mind lashed together, midmorning pain atop predawn beauty. Were those magic moments in the dark really today?

We fought our way to Platte Canyon Reservoir. With help from three extra birders, what looked like empty water gave us Redheads, a Hooded Merganser, a Common Goldeneye, and one Blue-winged Teal. We also got our Black-chinned Hummingbird. By 10:30 a.m., we'd been birding for 7 hours, and we were ahead of schedule.

So, we called an audible. Having missed Canyon Wren earlier, we detoured up Waterton Canyon for another try. We saw bighorn sheep, but the cliffs were silent. The rushing creek was dipper-less. The grind had begun: 45 minutes with nothing to show.

On the way down, we heard a Yellow-breasted Chat in a dry patch of cottonwoods. Stopping for shade and water, we found more: a Virginia's Warbler for me and a pair of phoebes for Scott. Though rare in the Denver area, Eastern Phoebe and Black Phoebe have found places to breed and, strangely, they are hybridizing. Scott thought one was a pure Eastern and the other probably an Eastern x Black hybrid.

We made a grand tour of Chatfield State Park, poking in at coves and marshes. We were getting testy, but the park rewarded us with Least Flycatcher, Hairy Woodpecker, Ruddy Duck, Virginia Rail, and more as lunchtime neared. Friend and fellow birder **Dale Pate** looked like the Second Coming when he arrived with Arby's. Although the reservoir was too high for shorebirds, the marina sandspit held a single Willet. A Rock Wren bounced up nearby, and two Eared Grebes dove near the shore.

We climbed the massive dam and cruised its crest. "Bomb it?" I asked Scott. "Yep!" he shouted. We flew down to the South

Platte and sped north with a tailwind. Later we learned that a Northern Mockingbird was seen on that stretch the day before us and the day after. Tantalizing? Agonizing! When the miles you must cover are self-powered, it's impossible to bird every passing patch of trees.

Climbing again now to Littleton Cemetery, we waited in vain for a Ruby-crowned Kinglet seen there for two years running. Nothing but House Finches.

At that point we were burning tons of energy to add only a few more birds. Our mantra of "\$40 pledged per species" kept us going, but the missing kinglet hurt. A bit at a loss, we circled through the cemetery, where three young Mormon missionaries were finishing lunch on a bench. Then our only Snowy Egret of the day flew past — and wouldn't you know it? The kinglet began to sing.

We booked it for Ketring Park, where a Wood Duck materialized and a long-lingering Clark's Grebe floated into our laps. When a boy with a net stole up next to us to launch it at a goose (and miss), his shirtless father was furious: "How many times do I have to tell you? Leave the birds alone!"

Time for us to leave the birds alone, too?

After scanning our list again and refueling with food and water, we set off for the one place that promised new birds: Marston Reservoir, a beast to get to and a bear to bird.

The ride over on a narrow sidewalk was miserable — wind, wall, speeding cars, traffic cones, potholes. But Marston rewarded us with a Common Loon. As we lingered with a lively group of Yellow-rumped Warblers, cloud boiled overhead, and a terrible wind thrashed the trees. By the time we reached a gazebo for shelter, it was over and the day resumed. I glimpsed something moving deep in a bush. Scott, ready to move on but still game, called it first: MacGillivray's Warbler! An excellent cap to a long day.

Cruising downhill toward Scott's place, we detoured through Clement Park, his local patch. Habitat-wise, it didn't look like much — we joked that he's seen more bird species there (168 and counting) than the park has trees. It reminded me of my years living near Denver City Park, where I took bike and

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binoculars for a break from writing. Many birders give in to the carbon-intensive urge to drive far and wide for new birds. But there is great beauty in birding close to home, under your own power.

A lot of moments accumulate when you put yourself out there for one long day, just one. Joe Roller did that, too, watching, learning and connecting.

At 103 species, we pedaled slowly through Scott's neighborhood and heard No. 104 Bushtit. As we dumped our gear on Scott's lawn, he spotted a White-crowned Sparrow on the back fence. 105! After 14 hours and 62 miles, we had raised \$4,300 — big green on a Green Big Day.



When he first met Mimi, she was in her first year of medical school and learning anatomy (that is, spending a lot of time with a cadaver). “Oh,” said Joe, “I’ve got to send you these pictures.” A few days later he emailed us a blog post describing how, a hundred years ago, the black humor of med school took the form of students posing for portraits with their cadavers . . . sometimes even posing the cadavers around the students! He loved the absurd, and yet even something so absurd as that, he treated with sympathy and grace. (He wrote that he saw it as an attempt by the students to counterbalance the anxiety they felt when facing death and the human body so closely.)

I don’t actually remember the first time I met Joe. He is one of the biggest birding mentors I have had. We did so much together over the years. He had two cars, and each license plate was a different condensation of the word “Peregrine” — his favorite bird.

Which reminds me of a time we went to Marston Reservoir to chase Ruddy Turnstones and other good Denver birds. It could be challenging to go on a chase with Joe in those years, because he had to plan in advance and could not be gone from his wife **MaryAnne** for more than a few hours. We had had a phase of repeated dips, and on this day we were one step behind the birds. We circled the reservoir several times, along the way getting reports from other birders saying, yes, they were just here, they flew that way. Yet Joe remained upbeat. I don’t know if he truly cared about getting “the bird” or not. His day was made when he found not one but two Peregrine Falcons resting on the mudflats. Finally, when his internal timer had run out and he was attempting to drag me away from my scope, we found a Common Tern on a concrete pipe. Though he clearly wanted to go home, he took a moment to puzzle through its field marks with me and enjoy the bird. And then the turnstones came moseying up behind it! And then we were speeding back home. His devotion to MaryAnne was legendary.

Mimi and I loved being around Joe. With a lot of birders you have to work hard if you want the conversation to travel anywhere other than birds. With Joe, the talk wandered freely from birds to Mimi’s experience in medicine to our mutual love of words and arcane history.

Others have written about how good he was at nudging people toward taking on new responsibilities. I was one of

those people, and I got to watch him do it again and again in the DFO boardroom. He started meetings by saying he was only there to get the title he would have next: *ex-president* of DFO. And then he would proceed to run an organized, efficient meeting. DFO grew by leaps and bounds under his leadership. He had a knack for finding the right people to take on various tasks and then giving them the confidence and freedom to run with those tasks outside the boardroom. His approach to leadership continues to influence my own board service.

A quick afternoon visit to Joe and MaryAnne was never just a visit. Joe would break out cheese and crackers and even champagne with blackberries. We talked endlessly about our families. As Mimi and I have corresponded with Joe over the last year, we’ve commented a number of times about how fortunate he and MaryAnne were to have their kids and grandkids within a few minutes’ drive. Family meant so much to him, and he got to see them all the time.

We last saw Joe in January. He got to meet our son, **George** (two months old at the time), at a diner and gave us a gift-wrapped box. You could tell he was frustrated about the mystery of his health issues, and yet he somehow also remained curious, wry, and open about it. It was a wonderful visit. When Mimi, George, and I got back to where we were staying, we had a surprise. The gift box was empty! We debated whether or not we should tell Joe. In the end we realized that he of all people would get a kick out of it, so we called to thank him for the nice box and the tissue paper inside. He was mortified but soon he was laughing. He tracked down the actual gift and took a special trip to bring it to us on our way to the airport.

That was the last time we saw him. In true Joe fashion, the gift was beautifully presented, fancy, and also a little absurd: along with some clothes, a stuffed animal that looks sort of like a deer or a rabbit with sparkling gray antlers. A jackalope? Of course, it’s one of George’s favorites.

Joe Roller was a legend in his own time. He deserves every tribute we can give him. For every story we might tell, he could tell ten.

— **Chris Rurik**, *Lakebay, WA*

CONSERVATION

12 Tips for '21: The time is right to help Broad-tailed Hummingbirds

Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. 12 for '21 aims to inform readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily life. Look for tips from members of DFO's Conservation Committee in each newsletter throughout 2021.

Colleen Nunn

One of the signs of spring in our region is the buzzing trill of the male Broad-tailed Hummingbird as he races around, searching for nectar and defending his territory. We hear this distinctive sound so frequently that you might assume Colorado's populations of the species are in great shape. But as I discovered in researching this installment of *12 Tips for '21*, that is not the case. In the process, I found some excellent reasons for each of us to consider taking individual actions to help this most common of our local hummingbird species.

Perhaps you've already told yourself this is the year that you'll feed and otherwise help these tiny summer guests — putting up a feeder, studying up on whether your garden habitat is right for them, perhaps checking out which plants and flowers support their tastes. Blanketflower? Bee Balm? The many varieties of penstemon? What about that store-bought, red-dyed sugar water? What else do hummingbirds eat?

We'll get to more of that shortly. But first, some essential background on why Broad-tailed Hummingbirds need our help. The threats are illustrated in several survivability reports prepared by bird scientists who track vulnerable species.

One of the most detailed is from the [Avian Conservation Assessment Database](#). It's one of two ongoing datasets maintained by [Partners in Flight](#), a network of more than 150 organizations across the Western Hemisphere. Both databases are overseen by the Colorado-based Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, whose avian conservation scientist **Arvind Panjabi** discussed them in a DFO Zoom webinar last December (video at <https://archive.org/embed/dfo-2020-12&autoplay=1>).

The avian conservation database enables us to assess which species need attention now, and which can benefit from conservation efforts later. With Panjabi's help, I learned that threatened species that breed in our region deserve assistance first, and that includes the Broad-taileds that nest among us each summer.

Six vulnerability factors are in play for this species in our region. Two rank "high" — the hummingbird's overall population decline, and a sparser-than-desired

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Broad-tailed
Hummingbird male
Jim Esten

Other species of concern we can help, too

Colleen Nunn

Now that you have tips and tools for helping the Broad-tailed Hummingbird, there are other breeding species in and around the metro Denver region that can use your help, too. The birds listed and categorized below are also taken from the Avian Conservation Assessment Database list of locally breeding species of regional or continental importance for conservation concern and/or stewardship responsibility.

Consider performing acts large and small to help these birds. Build or install nest boxes. Maintain the kind of native plants and habitat they need in your yard or other property. Install and maintain water fountains or birdbaths. Invite the neighbors to do similar good things that extend the reach of your assistance.

Informing yourself and offering these species their preferences and actual needs will reward you with yearly return visits.

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population density per acre. Combined with “moderate” rankings for four other vulnerability factors, the Broad-tailed rates as a species of “regional or continental importance.”

Another reason for concern is the species’ rating on Partners in Flight’s U.S.-Canada Watch List of vulnerable species, first created in 2004. The Broad-tailed rates “code yellow” on this watch list. Although not “code red,” for highest concern, the rating still demands “management attention” to the species. As a code-yellow bird, it is considered in decline, faces high threats, and is range-restricted geographically.

The Broad-tailed is also flagged in the National Audubon Society’s 2019 report, *Survival by Degrees: 389 Species on the Brink*, which examined probable effects of climate change on birds. In the report’s Colorado chapter, this hummingbird is classified “high” in vulnerability to loss of North American range because of warmer summers. Although some avian species will gain habitat because of climate change and others will not be affected, the Broad-tailed is expected to suffer from extreme spring heat waves and fire weather in Colorado.

One more point of concern is in *The Second Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas*, which states that the federal Breeding Bird Survey has charted annual declines of nearly 2 percent in Broad-tailed Hummingbirds since 1968. Worse still, the rate of decline since 2002 has grown to 3 percent a year. *The Bird Atlas* concludes that this data suggests “a long-term and accelerating population decline in the state” for this hummingbird.

What’s more, 67 percent of the Broad-tailed Hummingbird population inhabits a bird conservation region that includes western Colorado, eastern Utah, and northern Arizona and New Mexico. Thus, Colorado shares “stewardship responsibility” for this hummingbird. All of which means the primary onus for human work toward the Broad-tailed’s survival in Colorado rests on the shoulders of us and our Four Corners neighbors, and no one else.

If all of this sounds daunting, it doesn’t have to be. We can do so much to help, one yard at a time. Perhaps you’re now planning to purchase a hummingbird feeder (or to clean the one you already own) and set it up. An interesting fact I’ve learned is that the sugar-water solution we pour into our hummingbird feeders is not the only thing these sugar-buzzed buzzers consume. For adults with mouths to feed back at the

nest, that feeder juice and natural nectar from flowers are the hummingbird Red Bull they need while foraging aggressively for insect protein to feed their growing chicks. Insects fuel nestlings’ critical three-week cycle of bone development.

That means welcoming insects into your garden, yard or other property is another great way to help hummingbirds. Check out **Tina Jones’** article in last month’s issue of *The Lark Bunting* for advice on what to plant to attract the insects that birds love, as well as the plants that most attract hummingbirds for their nectar.

The hummingbirds’ breeding cycle, in fact, starts with insects and plants. Did you know that hummers use spider webs, dandelion heads, thistle down and other “lawn products” to build their nests? These materials provide both structure and insulation. So, forgo mowing and raking all your acreage into a tidy jewel during breeding season (May through July) and leave some yard litter for the birds.

Two major points about feeding hummingbirds. Making your own sugar water is better than buying a commercial mix that contains red dye. Yes, hummingbirds are attracted to the color, but the reservoirs on most feeders already *are* red. Simply mix four parts water to one part sugar — and don’t forget to clean your feeder regularly and correctly.

Finally, I encourage you to check out the archived video of our DFO monthly program last March. Southern Arizona hummingbird expert **Sheri Williamson**, who wrote the *Peterson Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America*, delivered even more practical advice about helping hummingbirds, including the Broad-tailed.

Who knew, for instance, that leaving scraps of hair and unbleached cotton on the ground would provide hummingbirds nesting material? Or that leaving alone any branches that overhang a hummingbird nest preserves protection from predators and cold spells that led the bird to nest there in the first place? For these and so many more tips, view the full Zoom video of Williamson’s presentation in DFO’s program archive at <https://archive.org/embed/dfo-2021-03-22&autoplay=1>.

**Metro Denver “forest” breeding
species of concern:**

- Virginia’s Warbler
- Green-tailed Towhee
- Plumbeous Vireo
- Pygmy Nuthatch
- Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay
- Williamson’s Sapsucker
- Mountain Bluebird
- Western Bluebird

**Metro Denver “plains” breeding
species of concern:**

- Cassin’s Sparrow
- Mountain Plover
- Western Kingbird
- Lark Bunting

**Beyond Metro Denver
breeding species of concern:**

- Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
- Gunnison Sage-Grouse
- Gray Vireo
- Flammulated Owl
- Pinyon Jay
- Clark’s Nutcracker
- Juniper Titmouse
- Grace’s Warbler

**Welcome to new DFO
members**

Brian Genge of Thornton; Cindi Johns, Aurora; Amy Morton, Arvada; Marjorie Roosevelt, Englewood; Sarah Slater, Aurora, and Dale Vodehnal of Denver

**Thank you for your
contributions**

**Research, Education and
Conservation Grants Fund**
Jack Bellomo and Chris Goulart

DFO AdBIRDtisements!

DFO members! Submit your free ads and announcements to *The Lark Bunting* to seek or sell birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, etc.). This includes materials offered for donation.

- Ads may include descriptions of merchandise for sale or being sought, including condition and asking price
- Ads must include full name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a website link if merchandise or items are being offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit ads for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit; no accompanying photos or artwork, please)
- Ads will not carry over month-to-month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Service is free but available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: **last day of each month** (except January and June; *The Lark Bunting* does not publish in the months of February and July)

To place a DFO “AdBIRDtisement,” email **Patrick O’Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, at patodrisk@gmail.com. Next deadline: **Saturday, July 31**

FOR SALE

USED BOOKS!

Both hardbound and in excellent condition:

Life Along Land’s Edge: Wildlife on the Shores of Roebuck Bay, Broome by Rogers, Piersma, Lavaleye, Pearson and de Goeij; 2003; 162 pages (numerous color photos; published by the Western Australia Department of Conservation and Land Management). Internationally important end point of most species-rich shorebird flyway, winter home to 100K birds of 29+ species. Location of Broome Bird Observatory. Extensive coverage of birdlife and marine life. — \$45

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Contact: **Bill Turner**, 303-795-5128, toursbyturner@aol.com

Volunteer Here! . . .

Your picnic help, program ideas, writing, photos

Sharon Tinianow

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization, and we need more members to step up and join the fun. This regular feature in *The Lark Bunting* will share ways for you to get active with DFO, from one-time opportunities to committee membership and leadership.

If you have skills worth sharing with DFO, we welcome you to contact us. Let's talk about where you'd like to get involved. For starters, there are two ways to tell us you're interested: contact me, DFO Vice President **Sharon Tinianow**, by email at sharontinianow@gmail.com, or fill out the [volunteer interest form](#) on the DFO website. If you'd like to help, here are a few volunteer opportunities to consider.

One-time events

- DFO's annual members-only picnic is set for Saturday, Sept. 18. **Dave Hill**, immediate past president of DFO, has volunteered to advise a committee to plan and produce this very fun event. If you have time for a couple of planning meetings this summer and/or are available on Sept. 18 to help set up, oversee the grill, or clean up, contact Dave at davidhill2357@gmail.com.

Club committee work

- As you can see from the list elsewhere in this issue, **Bill Turner**, DFO's manager for monthly programs, has scheduled speakers for evening programs each month from August through November 2021. Bill is always looking for more ideas for presenters and/or topics. Contact him directly with your suggestions at toursbyturner@aol.com
- It is not too early to develop promotional plans for DFO monthly programs that resume in August (after our annual summer break from evening programs). If you like to write and are comfortable using email and posting to Facebook, this is a fun role that helps DFO spread the word about our fantastic monthly programs. Contact Sharon Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com

The Lark Bunting

- DFO's 10-times-a-year newsletter needs contributors to write and take photos, and it also needs an assistant editor. This person would help put out the newsletter the first week or so of the month, and learn the ropes about editing, writing, coming up with seasonal story ideas, etc. Longer-term, the assistant editor puts out the newsletter on occasion if the editor is away and, eventually, can become editor if/when the current editor retires. To learn more about helping with *The Lark Bunting*, email editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com
- Newsletter photography? Yes, we need photos of birds and birding, especially candidates for the coveted cover spot of *The Lark Bunting*. Look at previous covers in the archive on the DFO website (go to <https://dfobirds.org/News.aspx> and click on "PAST ISSUES") to see what kinds of bird "portraits" we're after. If you've got good quality shots that would fit or crop to fit our vertical-rectangle cover slot, contact photo editor **Jim Esten** at jcesten@gmail.com

JUNE–JULY FIELD TRIPS

Register for DFO field trips on website or contact leader directly. Bring binoculars, water, snacks and/or lunch, insect repellent and hat/sunscreen. Dress for the weather. See directions and detailed descriptions of each trip on website. Covid-19 vaccination strongly recommended. No mask-wearing required but please carry one.

Please be considerate and delete your reservation if you are unable to attend a trip for which you have registered.

*August field trips will be posted on the DFO website on **July 1**.*

Castlewood Canyon State Park (Douglas County)

Tuesday, June 15

8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Mark Amershek
mamershek@msn.com

720-243-1521

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 6 max

We will bird in the park, and possibly local gravel pits and other local spots depending on time and bird activity. About 2 miles of walking. Bring lunch. Especially good trip for novice birders and new members.

Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat / Sawhill (Boulder County)

Tuesday, June 29

8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Mark Amershek
mamershek@msn.com

720-243-1521

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 7 max

About 1-2 miles on level ground. Waterfowl on lakes, resident Great Horned Owls, hawks, and American Dipper and lingering kinglets or warblers. Bring binoculars, snacks, water and, if you have one, a scope.

First Creek @ DEN Open Space (Denver County)

Sunday, June 20

6 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Patrick O'Driscoll

patodrisk@gmail.com

303-885-6955

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 15 max

Forty-five species seen here on a DFO trip 2 years ago. Expect early summer riparian-cottonwood-prairie species. We will walk 1.5-mile paved path along creek upstream and back, plus half a mile of Buckley Road. Time permitting, we will bird the First Creek Trail in Rocky Mtn Arsenal NWR.

Louviers (town) and DuPont Open Space (Douglas County)

Sunday, June 27

6:15 a.m. – noon

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

303-885-6955

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 10 max

The spring burst is over, but there are still songbirds, woodpeckers, flycatchers and more to in this leafy, sleepy Douglas County village. Lots of bird feeders and bird-friendly yards. Also walk DuPont Open Space along Plum Creek, Water, snacks, sun protection, and wear pants for grassy open space woods.

Roxborough State Park (Douglas County)

Friday, July 2

7 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Gregg Goodrich
GreggGoodrich@gmail.com

303-655-9135

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 8 max

State parks pass or day pass required. Three miles of moderately easy hiking on the Willow Creek Trail. Lazuli Buntings, Virginia Warblers and Vireos are likely, as is a Golden Eagle.

JUNE–JULY FIELD TRIPS

Heron Pond Natural Area / Heller Open Space (Denver County)

Saturday, July 3

6:15 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com
303-885-6955
Trail rating: easy
Participants: 12 max

DFO trip this week In 2019 logged 36 species. This diamond in the rough of Denver's industrial /recycling district is a spring migrant stopover, but birds congregate here year-round. Trip route follows pond shoreline and marshlands, through fields in Heller Open Space, then south to Carpio Sanguinette Park and South Platte River.

Bluff Lake Nature Center (Denver County)

Sunday, July 4

6:30 a.m. – noon

Megan Miller
megan.k.miller2473@gmail.com
720-775-9710
Trail rating: easy
Participants: 15 max

A great range of bird habitat — wetland, yucca, and large cottonwoods — attracts a variety of raptors and songbirds. We'll walk about 1.5 miles.

Lake County

Monday, July 5

5 a.m. – 4 p.m.

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com
831-713-8659
Trail rating: moderate
Participants: 10 max

Explore several locations around Lake County to sample varied habitats and seek the variety of summer nesting birds in this gorgeous, rarely birded mountain county. Carpooling with three vehicles. Bring lunch and snacks, and a scope is recommended

Mount Evans State Wildlife Area (Clear Creek County)

Tuesday, July 6

5 a.m. – 2 p.m.

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com
831-713-8659
Trail rating: moderate
Participants: 10 max

Mount Evans SWA occupies lower elevation (8,000-9,000 feet) areas of southeastern Clear Creek County in the Deer Creek watershed and is only open to birders part of the year. Expect a good sampling of forest-nesting birds and birds of some other habitats. We may visit a private ranch nearby with more great access. 3-4 miles of walking on moderate slopes (slow pace). State fishing or hunting license or wildlife pass required to enter the SWA.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams County)

Sunday, July 11

6 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com
303-885-6955
Trail rating: moderate
Participants: 12 max

In early summer, we'll walk one or two of the main trails (perhaps around Lakes Ladora and Mary, plus the trail out to Havana Ponds and/or Gun Club Pond). Either way, we'll start on foot and finish with a slow spin out the Wildlife Drive/Loop. Be prepared to carpool part of the time.

Park County Explorations

Monday-Tuesday, July 12-13

5:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com
831-713-8659
Trail rating: strenuous
Participants: 9 max

Two days + overnight campout with option for just the first day. Monday: Kite Lake in search of White-tailed Ptarmigan,

JUNE–JULY FIELD TRIPS

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch and other high-elevation species and moderately strenuous (but slow-paced) hiking, plus other areas for Park County breeders. Overnight in Forest Service campground (camping fee). Tuesday: Georgia Pass and north end of South Park for Three-toed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak, Dusky Grouse and other breeders. Bring own camping gear and all needed food. Carpool of 3-4 cars, but small SUV with clearance minimum for Kite Lake road.

Mount Evans area via Squaw Pass Road (Jefferson County)

Tuesday, July 13

7:00 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Mark Amershek
mamershek@msn.com

720-243-1521

Trail rating: easy

Participants: 12 max

Driving up Mount Evans to Summit Lake in very diverse spruce, fir, aspen habitat in search of Pine Grosbeak, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, ptarmigan, sapsuckers. Explore around Echo Lake. Dress for all-day mountain trip with appropriate clothing. Lunch at Echo Lake Lodge. Barrow's Goldeneye and American Three-toed Woodpecker at Echo Lake and all four hummingbirds possible at lodge later in summer. Carpool limited to 4 cars.

Banner Lakes State Wildlife Area (Weld County)

Thursday, July 22

7 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Mark Amershek
mamershek@msn.com

720-243-1521

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 12 max

There are numerous small to medium-sized ponds, many ringed with marshes, Russian olives, and junipers. About 2-3 miles of moderate, flat, on- and off-trail hiking. Scopes helpful but not required. Potential hawk / owl search of DIA loop in the afternoon. State fishing, hunting or wildlife license required to enter SWA.

Apex Trail-West Entrance (upper portion) (Jefferson County)

Tuesday, July 27

6:30 – 11 a.m.

Jill Boice
jill@booksandcats.net
303-863-7580

Trail rating: moderate

Participants: 6 max

This trail through vertical Apex Park between Golden and Lookout Mountain Road runs along a small gulch, usually wet, and passes through different micro-habitats. We will drop down into the gulch to pursue foothills birds, nuthatches, flycatchers and Steller's Jays. En route down we may find Lazuli Buntings, warblers and Green-tailed Towhee. 2 hours downhill, quick rest and climb back up Apex Trail. Steep trail but we'll take our time. Bring plenty of water.



House Wren
Jim Esten



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:

Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 09 | SEPTEMBER 2021

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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There when the birds
we rescue need them

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BIRDING TECH REVIEW

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Williamson's Sapsucker

📷 Jim Esten

📍 Rosita, Custer County





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Rehab experts: There when the birds we rescue need them

Susan Blansett

As I was returning home from a birding hike a few Sundays back, I noticed something small lying prone on the asphalt across the street from my driveway. Looking more closely, I found it was a young Cliff Swallow, one wing awkwardly askew — oh no! The morning was already hot, and the bird was panting and dangerously exposed to traffic. I picked it up gingerly, folded the wing back against its body, and carried it inside to figure out what to do.

Holding the swallow carefully in my left hand, I frantically Googled “What to do with an injured bird” with my right. I found and followed this advice: 1) Refrain from feeding the bird or giving it water, as it’s probably in shock; 2) Wrap the bird in a soft cloth to keep it from moving about and injuring itself further, and 3) Place it in a small box with a lid and plenty of air holes (poked in the box by my brother, **Joe**).

Back on the computer, I searched for an animal or bird rehabilitator. Hallelujah for Colorado Parks & Wildlife, which keeps a list of wildlife rehabbers on its website at <https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/SWL-WildlifeRehab.aspx>. I began calling. After one dead end and another voicemail, my third call was answered by a very pleasant woman at [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#) in Longmont. Hooray again! I had stumbled upon the only Front Range animal rehab facility open on Sunday, and it was less than an hour away.

At this point, I wondered aloud to the woman on the phone if the kinder thing I could do for the poor bird was to wring its little neck so it would no longer suffer. “Oh no!” she replied. “Often a fractured wing can be repaired and the bird can go on to live a normal life.”

“I’m on my way!” I said, grabbing my keys and my bird-in-a-box for the drive north from Golden. Within an hour, I found Greenwood, a lovely and rather large facility a mile east of Lyons on State Highway 66. “For incoming patients only” read a sign at the closest parking spot. Beyond it was a long row of animal enclosures of varying sizes. Carrying my incoming patient toward the entrance, I passed a whiteboard identifying Greenwood’s most recent patient as a Tree Swallow.

Inside, I was quickly greeted by a young woman named **Robin**, who immediately took the bird back to one of the examination rooms and then returned to take down my information. Robin then handed me a Greenwood business card with “Patient #2309” written on the back so I could check back on the bird’s progress. Impressed, I made a suitable donation, thanked Robin profusely, and promised to mention their wonderful facility in my next column in *The Lark Bunting*.

Turning to leave, I noticed a father and daughter behind me, checking in a bucketful of rescued crawdads!

On the drive home, I hoped fervently that “my” little swallow would live to fly again. After all, the center had an indoor enclosure full of recovering swallows. Two days later, I phoned Greenwood to ask about Patient #2309. Sadly, I learned in an email reply from **Seneca**, one of the staff, that the bird’s left wing had a nasty compound fracture; Greenwood had humanely euthanized it on Sunday afternoon. “With injuries such as this we are unable to rehabilitate the animal successfully,” Seneca explained. “I’m sorry to deliver the sad news. We appreciate you bringing the bird in and looking out for its best interest!”

Continued on page 3



Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
Susan Blansett



Swallow rehab enclosure
Mysti Tatro, Greenwood Wildlife



Cliff Swallow
Mysti Tatro, Greenwood Wildlife

Later, Greenwood's executive director **Linda Tyler** gave me some further context about their critical role: "As the only center caring for birds, waterfowl, and mammals from north of Pueblo to the Wyoming border, we provide an incredibly vital service to the Colorado Front Range. We are proud of all the wildlife in need we've helped over the past 39 years."

Although sad at the swallow's outcome, I feel wiser and grateful to know that Greenwood is there when needed. Please check them out at www.greenwoodwildlife.org and consider a donation to these wonderful people for the fabulous work they do.

Good birding!

— **Susan**



Aves de Pura Vida: Birding in Costa Rica

Max Vindas
Monday, August 23, 2021
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

In Costa Rica, “Pura Vida” — literally “pure life” — is an all-purpose hello and goodbye, a toast, a cheer, a celebration, an attitude to live by. The phrase is everywhere . . . and so are Costa Rica’s birds. Although less than one-fourth the size of Colorado, Costa Rica is home to more than 900 species — and veteran birding guide **Max Vindas** has seen or heard most if not all of them.

A senior naturalist guide for Horizontes Nature Tours, Vindas will lead participants in DFO’s Aug. 23 evening program on an exploration of birds in his country’s wide-ranging regions, from bird-rich highlands of the Talamanca Mountains in the south to dry tropical forests of the northwest, and on both Pacific and Caribbean coasts in between. A 20-year veteran leading eco-tourism outings, he can easily identify flora and fauna from every corner of Costa Rica. He considers his keen ear and bird sound ID his biggest strength.

In addition to Costa Rica, Vindas has led birdwatching trips throughout Central America and Brazil for eco-tourism companies including National Geographic, Lindblad Expeditions and more. A born birder, he refined his skills while earning a bachelor’s degree in natural resources administration and management. He complements his guide work with lectures and has consulted for the Inter-American Development Bank and the state of Tocantins in Brazil, where he helped develop state parks in Cantão and Jalapão.

To register for this Aug. 23 Zoom presentation, click this registration link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_vKkEL8z4Tlmm_TaizFbJuQ

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July–August and February–March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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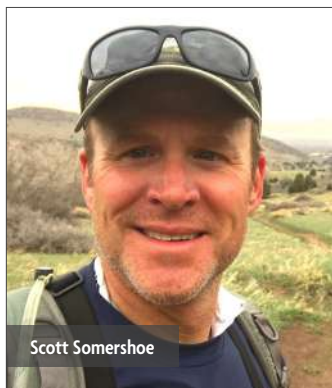
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A Green Big Year: My 2021 birding quest for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant

Scott Somershoe

Monday, September 27, 7 p.m. MDT

Unity Spiritual Center Denver

3021 S. University Blvd.

On Jan. 1, 2021, DFO member **Scott Somershoe** embarked on his second “Green Big Year” — a self-powered, carbon-free quest to record as many species in Colorado as possible, but only within walking or cycling distance from his home in Littleton. Aiming for at least 250 species this year, Somershoe had already listed 243 species as of the end of July — just one short of the 244 he recorded in his year-long 2020 pursuit.

On Sept. 27, Scott will tell the story of his Big Year so far, from planning and logistics to adventures and misadventures, “the birds, the bike routes, the people and the experiences.”

The species tally is important because Somershoe is gathering per-species pledges and flat donations for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant for bird research in Colorado. Somershoe and Colorado Field Ornithologists established the fund in tribute to **Joe Roller**, the longtime Colorado ambassador for birding (and member of both DFO and CFO) who died last November.

Somershoe is land birds coordinator for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region. Look for more details about this presentation in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*. To follow his Green Big Year endeavor until then, visit his Joe Roller Memorial Green Big Year blog at <https://jrmemorialgreenbigyear.blogspot.com/>.



The Internet of Wings: How the data revolution is about to change the way you bird

Nathan Pieplow

Monday, October 25, 7 p.m. MDT

Unity Spiritual Center Denver

3021 S. University Blvd.

What if your phone could pick out rarities for you from a flock of birds? What if it could tell you exactly where an individual migrant came from and where it is going? These technologies already exist, or soon will — and **Nathan Pieplow**, one of Colorado’s foremost birders, has plenty to say about them.

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FALL PROGRAM PREVIEWS CONT.

In this presentation at DFO's Oct. 25 evening program meeting, Pieplow will discuss how cutting-edge innovations in bird tracking and automatic identification can enhance conservation, supercharge citizen science, and broaden the appeal of birding.

You'll learn how the song of a White-crowned Sparrow communicates not just its species identity, but its street address. You'll learn what happened when a flock of curlews ran into a snowstorm, and how we know. And you'll learn how YOU can collect the data needed to reverse declines in bird populations.

A former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' *Colorado Birds* quarterly journal, he is the author of the two volumes of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* for both western and eastern North America. Pieplow's day job is assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. A man of multiple talents, he even dabbles in graphic design. He won the National Association of Science Writers contest last year to design its ScienceWriters2020 conference logo.

A native of South Dakota, he grew up fascinated by birds and has been an intense student of bird sounds for 18 years. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail website](#).

Look for more details about his October presentation in next month's issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



From “Crazy French” to Fishers Peak: Colorado’s newest state park

Crystal Dreiling

Monday, November 22, 7 p.m. MST

Last October, Fishers Peak State Park became the newest of Colorado's 42 state parks. With dense, wildlife-rich forests, grasslands, foothills and mesas in the mountainous southern borderlands outside Trinidad, the park opened in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with public access to only a tiny, 250-acre patch of its 19,200 total acres.

At the time, **Crystal Dreiling**, park manager of both Fishers Peak and nearby Trinidad Lake State Park, said the goal was “to give everyone a taste of the hiking, hunting, wildlife watching and more that will be available once the park is fully developed in coming years.” Fishers Peak is the result of a partnership among the state, the Trust for Public Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the local Trinidad community, among others.

Join Dreiling in DFO's final monthly evening program of 2021 to learn more about Fishers Peak SP's origins (locals called it Crazy French Ranch), what's open now and what's ahead, and the new park's prospects for birders (68 species in just 21 eBird reports from the Fishers Peak's Moore Canyon hotspot since May 2020).

Look for more details about her November presentation in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

DFO monthly programs, post-pandemic: Zoom . . . in-person . . . livestream, too?

Sharon Tinianow

Like just about everything else in life since coronavirus invaded in early 2020, it has been an interesting year for Denver Field Ornithologists monthly programs. Now that we can gather in-person and indoors again, how we return to evening programs this fall and beyond may get even more interesting. Imagine it: How about both in-person AND online options, sometimes at the same time?

Looking back, things appeared bleak in spring 2020 after DFO had to cancel the final two monthly programs of the season because of Covid-19 restrictions on indoor gatherings. But over that first summer of pandemic lockdown, a determined group of club officers, board members and other volunteers figured out how to deploy the suddenly popular Zoom webinar platform to present our fall and winter programs.

And DFO learned to use that online technology very well. In the ensuing months, hundreds of program attendees were connecting from home with top-notch speakers in Alaska, Ohio, South Carolina and Arizona, in addition to strong local Colorado presenters. The programming pivot to Zoom webinars was so successful that “attendance” at monthly DFO programs doubled, tripled, even quadrupled over the average in-person turnout of previous years.

(Special thanks go to DFO Secretary **Peter Stoltz** and website maven **Jim Esten** for managing the technical side of things, and to then-president **Dave Hill**, current president **Susan Blansett** and Program manager **Bill Turner** for learning to facilitate our evening programs in Zoom Land.)

With 2021's easing of restrictions on in-person and indoor assembly, the DFO Board decided to use the summer hiatus to assess what we've learned from doing programs online and what our programming options look like ahead. A resulting survey in June of DFO members via Survey Monkey revealed an important reality: While some members are eager to return to in-person gatherings, many others enjoyed attending monthly programs via Zoom. At the same time, respondents expressed an overwhelming preference for a “both/and” solution to include options for attending programs both in-person and remotely online.

Zoom, after all, has some distinct advantages. The recording quality is very high — far better, in fact, than the recordings we made and archived the previous two years at [Unity Spiritual Center Denver](#). Far

more people attended via Zoom, both members and non-members. Access to top-level speakers across the U.S. was suddenly possible, convenient and affordable (no travel arrangements and expenses).

On the other hand, online programs lacked the face-to-face interaction, club socializing and intimate feel of in-person gatherings. No applause, no laughter, and no two-way connection. Attendees sometimes had Zoom technical or user problems. The DFO Board had lots questions. Were Zoom webinars meeting member expectations?

Fortunately, DFO members were eager to respond. A total of 153 of you replied (out of 537 members), an extraordinarily high response rate (28 percent) for an online survey.

When asked what they like about Zoom webinars, they put the ability to connect with speakers from elsewhere and to attend from home at the top of the list. For some, traveling to and from our evening programs can be aggravated by distance, heavy traffic, and bad weather. For others, attending in person simply was no longer possible. Still others said Zoom webinars are a better learning experience because they can discuss things among themselves while watching without disrupting the audience.

At the same time, people miss being in person to socialize with other DFO members, share great bird sightings, and meet the speaker in person. Others had trouble with Zoom or are just tired of looking at another computer screen at the end of the day.

Out of such differing opinions arose overwhelming survey unity on a hybrid solution: Hold some in-person programs that are also livestreamed for at-home attendees, and some Zoom programs to continue DFO's rich connection with excellent speakers from out of town. One feedback suggestion was to convene in-person during months when it stays light out later (and night-driving hazards or discomfort are fewer) and switch to Zoom when it gets dark earlier and wintry weather would deter some from driving to and from an in-person gathering.

The DFO Board hears you. In late July, it voted 10-0 to experiment this fall with both kinds of program format. The Aug. 23 program will be a Zoom webinar, as the speaker will join us live from Costa Rica. The September and October programs will be held in person at Unity Spiritual Center Denver, but also livestreamed via YouTube so that anyone can watch via computer from home. (The November program

Continued on page 8

format will be set soon.) The board will assess at its November quarterly meeting how this combination plan is working and finalize plans then for the January through April programs.

“Livestream”? That simply means a live online feed of media — in this case, real-time video during a DFO presentation — that is simultaneously recorded and broadcast to viewers on a streaming-capable service like YouTube or Facebook. Between now and the September program, DFO plans to relaunch its own YouTube channel (as many thousands of other users already have) where anyone can tune in by computer, smart phone, tablet or similar device.

Earlier this year, Unity Denver acquired both the technology and the expertise to livestream its faith services. As part of DFO’s rental of the church’s meeting center for programs, Unity Denver will provide us both this enhanced technology and an expert technician to operate it. Best of all, those who want to attend in person can do so and those who would rather attend from home can do so, too. As now, recordings of DFO programs will continue to be posted on the Past Programs page of the DFO website.

Look for detailed information about how to access the DFO YouTube channel for in-person programs in a follow-up article in next month’s issue of *The Lark Bunting*. In the meantime, if you have not yet tried Zoom, you can find out how to get started here: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697>.

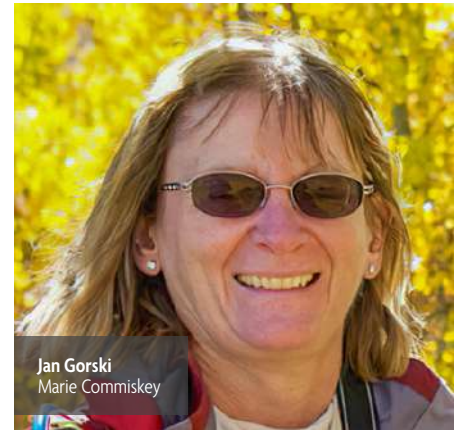
When registration opens for DFO’s Aug. 23 monthly program, all DFO members will receive an email with instructions for signing up. You’ll also be able to register from the [Programs page](#) of the DFO website. If a future DFO program is going to use Zoom, the program name will appear as a hyperlink. Clicking on that link will take you to a registration page. After you register, you’ll receive an email confirming your registration. When it’s time for the program, you’ll click on that link you received by email. Plans are underway to provide help for members who encounter problems with Zoom; look for an email about this in the near future.

Part of the DFO survey on programming asked members to suggest speakers and/or topics for future presentations. Respondents provided a long list of suggestions that Program manager Bill Turner is exploring and consulting for evening presentations next year and beyond.

Finally, survey respondents also expressed great appreciation for DFO programs. Here are a few of their remarks:

- *Thank you for being there. DFO has been important to me — forever!*
- *The quality of the programs has been excellent over the past many years*
- *I like the current variety that DFO comes up with. I enjoy hearing from advanced speakers like Drew Lanham but also from less polished speakers like local youth sharing their research/travels*

MEMBER NEWS



DFO’s Jan Gorski is eBirder of the Month for June

DFO members visiting the [eBird home page](#) this summer will see a familiar face if they scroll just below the opening screen. Featured under the “eBirder of the Month” heading is our own **Jan Gorski**, winner of the birding megadatabase’s monthly [eBird Challenge](#).

Gorski’s name was picked randomly from among 5,721 eBirders who fulfilled eBird’s monthly challenge for June 2021: Submit at least 20 checklists via eBird Mobile with birding “tracks” less than 3 miles long. She received a new pair of Zeiss Conquest HD 8x42 binoculars for her effort.

The eBird salute to Gorski, who lives in Highlands Ranch, CO, included her first-person essay under “Jan’s birding story.” It ranges from her casually taking up birding almost 30 years ago on a trip to Africa to her immersion in foreign travel for bird and wildlife photography and, finally, to her “joining local birding organizations” for field trips and conventions so she could learn about birds here at home.

The eBird tribute includes a couple of Gorski’s own bird photos (Red-footed Booby and Mountain Bluebird). View and read the entire spread on the eBird website at <https://ebird.org/news/jan-gorski-june-ebirder-of-the-month>.

Congratulations, Jan!

New Merlin Sound ID helpful, but know the risks

Chuck Hundertmark

On June 23, I opened this email message from my friend and fellow birder **Walt Combs**:

In case you missed this. I've tried it in my backyard and I am very impressed.

Walt had attached the announcement by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that [Merlin Sound ID](#) was now available. Many of you probably saw the same message from Cornell in your own inboxes.

Like Walt, I went out to my yard as soon as I had downloaded the new app. Pointing my cell phone at the nearest singing bird, I tapped the microphone icon on the Merlin app. Merlin promptly predicted that the songster was an American Robin, displaying a photo of it. Each time the bird in my yard vocalized, the app graphically depicted its sound in a spectrogram on my screen.

Subsequent field outings confirmed to me that this new app will be of great help in ID'ing many North American birds by ear. Along my initial "test drives," though, the app missed some identifications. For some bird songs, it had no idea what they might be. Misidentifications were even more disturbing. With that in mind, how should birders use Merlin Sound ID to fine tune their birding ear?

You may already be using Merlin, the Cornell Lab's mobile bird ID application with descriptions and photos of species. It also has a module for exploring species further. Merlin Sound ID is now part of the app. Perhaps you've already added the Sound ID module. If you haven't used any of Merlin before, you can download it all for free from the Apple Store or Google Play.

Once you have installed Merlin on your smart phone, when you hear a bird you want to ID or confirm, simply tap the app's microphone icon to begin recording it. As you do so, a blank spectrogram will begin to scroll across the top of your screen. If you are close enough for a good recording, you'll see the song pattern jump into view whenever the bird sings or calls. If it's a good recording without much background noise, Merlin will quickly offer its predicted ID of what you're hearing.

The key word here is "predicted." As Merlin notes, its suggestions are not positive IDs, though at times they are dead right. At times, however, the app can be dead wrong.

In fairness to the Cornell Lab wizards who developed Merlin Sound ID, the app will let you know when it doesn't know, with this message: "Merlin could not download likely birds." It may even give that message after offering predictions.

So, I suggest Merlin's best use is to help you improve your skills at identifying bird sounds. **Jessie Barry** of the Cornell Lab suggests you think of Merlin as a coach.

Here is a recent encounter I had in the field. At Park County's Michigan Creek Campground in July, I heard what sounded like a Wilson's Warbler, calling from the willows. The bird was close but elusive, so I "Merlin'd" its calls, expecting an instant confirmation of my ID. To my surprise, the app suggested Common Yellowthroat. Since I hadn't heard yellowthroats in the area, I waited for more suggestions.

The next suggestion was White-crowned Sparrow. In that case, Merlin was right; I could hear one singing in the distance. But that wasn't the bird hiding right in front of me. That can be both a strength and a frustration. The app often picks up both distant and close-in birds, but it doesn't know which of them is *your target* bird. So, when many birds are vocalizing at once, Merlin may offer many suggestions. It's up to you to interpret what Merlin tells you.

The app's next suggestion was Fox Sparrow. When that flashed on the screen, I realized Merlin was right again. One was singing in the distance. It was a new bird for my list, but again, not the target bird in the willows.

As I continued to record, my target warbler finally emerged for a visual glimpse — a male Wilson's Warbler. In the end, if you're not sure Merlin's suggested match is what you are hearing, keep trying for a look at the bird.

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Screen view of Merlin Sound ID

TECH REVIEW *cont from page 9*

In this situation, my location had an effect. Background noise like the running water of Michigan Creek makes it harder for Merlin to make an accurate suggestion. Also, calls are more difficult to ID than songs. But a few minutes after that Wilson's Warbler miss, Merlin correctly recognized the call of a Lincoln's Sparrow.

Cornell Lab's **Drew Weber** suggests that we consider Sound ID as a "birding buddy." It offers suggestions and predictions of what the app microphone hears. But you still have to decide whether they fit. Given your own level of familiarity with bird sounds, you may find Merlin confirming what you think you are hearing. Or perhaps Merlin's suggestion jogs your own uncertainty with an ID you had forgotten or hadn't considered. "Of course," you might say to yourself, "I should have recognized that Warbling Vireo song all along."

But if, say, you and Merlin think you hear an Indigo Bunting when you don't see one and you aren't really familiar with its song, seek further confirmation before adding it to your list. Keep trying for a visual ID. Use the other resources in Merlin itself to hear a recording of an Indigo Bunting. (To learn how to do that, watch this video from the Cornell Lab: <https://www.facebook.com/cornellbirds/videos/306392164560880>.)

Whether you're struggling to learn bird vocalizations or you're pretty good at it, I think you'll find Merlin Sound ID can enhance your enjoyment of birds and improve your ID skills. Although the season for singing is rapidly winding down, fall and winter will bring us many more opportunities for bird sound identification.





DFO NEWS

SAVE THIS DATE: DFO picnic returns September 18!

Patrick O'Driscoll

Nothing quite spells DFO togetherness — especially after the isolation and loss of a Covid-19 year-plus — than the return of our club's summer cookout at a great local birding hotspot. Mark your calendar now: It's the fifth Denver Field Ornithologists Members-Only Summer Picnic, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 18 at Prospect Park in Wheat Ridge!

While it's true this date is three months later than the usual early June of past DFO picnics, it will still be summer, technically — four days before Sept. 22's first day of autumn. More importantly, we will gather in a post-pandemic comfort zone for open-air get-togethers. Best of all, it's our first opportunity since 2020 for club fellowship and in-person socializing beyond field trips — and the grilled goodies and beverages are on DFO!

As in 2018 and 2019, the 2021 bratwurst-and-veggie-dog roast (with potluck salads, side dishes and desserts brought by the members) will be at the covered picnic pavilion in Prospect Park along the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (44th Avenue and Robb Street west of Kipling, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033). Complete details will be in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, but here are the basics:

- The picnic is free and open to all DFO members and families or “plus-1” guests
- DFO will bring and grill bratwurst and veggie dogs and supply the beverages
- Picnic attendees will be asked to bring potluck fare to share, assigned in alphabetical groupings by last name: salads (R - Z), side dishes (A - H), and desserts (I - Q)
- Grilling and eating begin at 11 a.m., with pre-picnic birding walks in the greenbelt starting as early as 7:30 a.m.

You can RSVP now through mid-September at this link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefxnDvajFsZe8d8SsCLAT7plbhvKQhQZ8IhvDXhx7AMRn41A/viewform>

Look for more details in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* . . . and come join us on Sept. 18!

Welcome to new DFO members

Marianne Batchelder, Arvada; Cindy Bouldin, Parker; Anne Craig, Lakewood; Ardith Duke, Denver; Scott Hathcock and Patricia Cullen, Longmont; Wendi Fisher, Arvada; Martin Gerra III, Boulder; Gene and Cynthia Hill, Thornton; Glenn Jacoby, Denver; Benjamin Jacques, Denver; Kelly Ormesher, Longmont; Rasik Patel, Englewood; Edith and Edith H Sage, Wheat Ridge, and Craig Thighe, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Friends of DFO

Kelly Ormesher, Longmont

CONSERVATION ESSAY

12 Tips for '21: The trouble with cats

Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats.

12 for '21 aims to inform readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily life. Look for tips from members of DFO's Conservation Committee in each newsletter throughout 2021.

Steve Ryder

He awakens well before dawn, rises from his lair and stretches. He focuses his senses on any movement, scent or unfamiliar sound, and stealthily sets out for his prey. He jumps up to the mesa top, tip-toes around the rolling landscape and arrives at his prey, staring at its last moments of serenity. He then retracts his claws and bats my nose repeatedly until I am fully awake.



The Cat
Steve Ryder

He is The Cat, and he is harmless — as long as his territory is confined to the inside of my house. If allowed to roam outdoors, he and his pals are a menace to your neighborhood birds.

Their ancestors go back thousands of years, worshiped by some ancient civilizations, reviled by others as everything from bad luck to sheer evil. Today's domestic cats are an amalgam of “good” and “bad,” with the good parts being their value as companionable pets. The bad parts? Well, this is where the story gets interesting.

Felis catus became an introduced species across of the globe, stowing away on ships where they terrorized rodents. They were valued for their mouse hunting skills by farmers, and held and carried about by royalty and commoner alike. And they always eyed their human keepers' other pets, often of the feathered kind — canaries, lovebirds, and . . . well, you get the idea.

Many introduced species, both plant and animal, manage to fit into natural, often disturbed ecological niches, making minor to moderate changes to these plant or animal communities. If cats were just like those introduced species, that would be the end of the story.

When outdoors, cats are both predator and prey. They are vulnerable to dogs, coyotes, foxes, Great Horned Owls and other larger predators. Nevertheless, they excel at predation on bountiful prey species both winged and terrestrial. If a plant or animal species is exceedingly successful at dominating ecological communities, we call them “invasive.” By definition, invasive species do not fit into new ecosystems, but instead raid their resources. Domestic cats allowed to roam outside are an invasive species.

“So what?” you ask: Human-dominated ecosystems have been exploited by animal and plant invaders for millennia. Why fret about outdoor cats?

For one thing, it is the sheer carnage they commit. The U.S. has an estimated 77 million to 100 million domestic cats. The ones that roam outside kill 2.4 billion to 4 billion birds (and up to 23 billion small mammals) annually. In fact, cats are one of the major threats that migratory and resident birds must face, along with habitat loss and window strikes.

Continued on page 13

We humans are cats' best friends and worst enemies. We are the worst when we let them outside. Not only do the birds suffer, but the cats suffer as well. The average life span of an indoor cat is 14 years. An outdoor cat? Two to five. Those statistics beg the obvious question: Why don't more, if not most cat owners prolong their beloved pets' lives by keeping them indoors?

I don't think humans who let their cats outside are cruel, but they seem to have a blind spot (not to mention a lazy spot if their cats prefer the neighbors' flower beds to indoor litter boxes). If the outcomes for outdoor cats are not cruel, they are certainly grim. Cats are torn up in fights, struck by cars, caught in traps, and poisoned. They can spread diseases such as rabies and toxoplasmosis. All this ought to be enough to keep Tabby inside — alive and unfulfilled as a natural predator, perhaps, but not shoveled up off the pavement of your neighborhood street, either.

Back to The Cat, my cat. He is a genial, active housemate who has lived his 18 years indoors happily (as far as I can tell). He is also a ferocious predator, but only the sparkly blue tinsel balls around the house encounter his wrath.

If you are a cat owner, please keep yours indoors. If you know cat owners who allow cats to roam, please consider sharing this article with them. Here are some excellent additional information sources on domestic cats and wild birds:

American Bird Conservancy

<https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/>

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

<https://www.birdconservancy.org/get-involved/live-bird-friendly/aboutcats/>

Denver Audubon

<https://denveraudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Denver-Audubon-Position-on-Free-Roaming-Cats.pdf>

So long, newsletter field trip listings . . .

A note to our readers:

With this issue, *The Lark Bunting* will no longer carry the list of upcoming Denver Field Ornithologists field trips and their descriptions that has graced these pages for decades.

It is true that, when the coronavirus pandemic struck in March 2020, the newsletter stopped carrying the trip listings — because there were no more to post! That month, the club suspended all in-person trips until group gatherings were safe again.

Happily, in 2021 we have returned to a full schedule of field trips. To mark that milestone, *The Lark Bunting* printed the July-August trip descriptions in our last issue. For some years, however, the simple reality has been that virtually every trip participant browses the listings on the DFO website's comprehensive field trip pages and signs up electronically right there.

In the online age, with 99.9 percent registration for field trips on the same webpage with trip descriptions and details, the monthly listings here became obsolete.

If you still read a printed-paper copy of *The Lark Bunting* (or, for that matter, the online version), click on over to <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx> and check out our many trips for August and September. Your best chance to secure a spot on a field trip is to visit the page on the first of each month when all new trips "go live."

With the newsletter space freed up by this change, we'll bring you more coverage of interesting and noteworthy topics for club members — including any important developments about DFO's most popular and beloved feature, our field trip program.

Thank you for continuing to read *The Lark Bunting*!

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor

Good with numbers? DFO needs YOU . . . to be our next club treasurer

Patrick O'Driscoll

Denver Field Ornithologists exists, operates and thrives in large part because of the time and expertise that our members volunteer to the club.

For the past 5 years, DFO member **Sue Summers** has kept the financial books for our organization. Although she has enjoyed the job, she's "looking for a change" in her service to the club. When her term expires in spring 2022, Summers intends to step away from the treasurer's role after training a successor in the not-complicated duties of DFO's financial officer.

But first, Sue and DFO need someone to volunteer for the post. How about you? You may be a good fit, she says, if you have "a good numbers aptitude . . . and experience with things like reconciling a bank account."

So far, so good. What else? "It's helpful if whoever takes the job is comfortable with basic accounting functions," Summers says, "although it's not complicated and I can train them." Translation: You DON'T have to be an actual accountant, and our treasurer herself WILL walk you through all the elements of this necessary function.

Summers averages several hours a month on treasurer tasks, though things slow considerably in summer. She is busiest between November and March, when there's more money to handle and a budget to update for the next year. Club members typically renew their memberships in the last two months of the year, when modest annual dues come in and are deposited. It's also when many members make tax-deductible donations to DFO.

"One nice thing is, the treasurer doesn't have to handle membership questions or collect dues like in a lot of organizations," Summers says. "DFO's Membership chair handles those. You're not collecting the money but just receiving it for deposit."

Year's end is also when the DFO Board adopts the annual budget. Drafting it essentially means working with the DFO Finance Committee to update the current one with any year-to-year changes or new items approved by the board.

Monthly tasks include paying a handful of bills (most are already on electronic auto-pay), depositing dues and donations, recording any financial activity in QuickBooks small-business accounting software, and reconciling DFO's bank account.

Four times a year, the treasurer creates simple financial updates for the DFO Board of Directors when it meets in February, May, August and November. And from time to time, a miscellaneous task or two may arise, from updating the club's insurance coverage to ordering supplies. Also, the treasurer fills out routine annual forms that 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations like ours are required to file with the IRS.

"Overall, it's a great volunteer job for someone who wants flexibility, since you do most of the work at home and on your own schedule," Summers says. "It's not overly burdensome. It's also a great way to learn all the ins and outs of our organization."

The DFO treasurer is an elective post, but don't worry: *You don't have to campaign.* Just declare your interest and learn the ropes from Summers, and the DFO Nominating Committee will put your name on the spring 2022 election ballot. You can't lose — and all of DFO wins, thanks to your volunteer generosity.

Wow, where do I sign up? If you're interested, contact Sue Summers herself to learn more: summerssue@hotmail.com or 253-678-3721.

DFO-funded avian research in 2021: Closer looks

Patrick O'Driscoll

Thanks to the generosity of DFO members and friends, six bird-related Colorado research projects have gone forward in 2021 with a combined \$7,500 in grants from Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Conservation & Education Fund.

The subjects of the winning research proposals range widely by species and location, from chickadees, wrens and an array of feeder birds along the urbanizing Front Range to birds of prey on the northeastern Colorado Plains and a heron colony on the Western Slope.

Here are synopses of each research project, distilled from the proposals the grant recipients wrote in seeking DFO's support. In addition to the grant winners, their affiliations and grant amounts, the names of any project advisers or co-investigators are in parentheses. Once their grant-funded work is complete, grantees are expected to report back to DFO in any of three ways: a program presentation, an article in *The Lark Bunting*, or a field trip to the location of their research.

GRAZING MANAGEMENT, RAPTOR ABUNDANCE

Recipient: **James Dwyer**, EDM International, Inc., \$750

Title: *Assessing Relationships between Grazing Management and the Abundance and Productivity of Northeastern Colorado Raptors*

Dwyer is a research scientist for EDM International in Fort Collins, where he investigates and works to prevent bird electrocutions on and collisions with power lines.

This DFO grant ties into his own research work on the same species central to his day job — hawks, eagles and owls. In quest of a long-term dataset, he has documented raptor productivity since 2015 within the Central Plains Experimental Range, an agricultural research station on the Pawnee National Grasslands north of Nunn, CO.



Swainson's Hawk juvenile
Jim Esten



Black-capped Chickadee
Patrick O'Driscoll

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Dwyer's prior research in this area (some of it supported by previous DFO grants) has suggested that Swainson's Hawk reproduction is better in areas with cattle than not, possibly because the species feeds primarily on insects, which are more abundant around livestock. His modest DFO grant for 2021 covers enough mileage reimbursement for a dozen 120-mile observation trips through the study area during the six-month breeding and nesting season for various birds of prey. Those are primarily Swainson's, but also Golden Eagle and, occasionally, Great-horned Owl and Ferruginous Hawk.

He began monitoring 2021 nests last March, did monthly surveys through May, then has increased his visits through summer to identify nest success or failure rates. He intends to report back to DFO via *The Lark Bunting* (as he did under a previous grant in 2017) this fall or winter.

GUNNISON COUNTY HERONS' HOME, HABITS

Recipient: **Jake Bartholomew**, Western Colorado University (Patrick Magee), \$1,718

Title: *Evaluating the Breeding Season Home Range and Foraging Habitats of the Slate River Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias)*

The Slate River Wetlands near Crested Butte, CO is home to a large and unusual nesting colony of Great Blue Herons: more than 20 nests in a high-elevation mountain stand of lodgepole pine. The river is also popular with stand-up paddleboarders, kayakers, river rafters and other outdoor recreationists. Bartholomew's work marks the fourth year in a five-year study (also supported previously by DFO) to investigate the effects of river recreation on the breeding population of herons and examine potential risks to the birds by increased disturbance from humans at play.

The project cooperates with Crested Butte Land Trust (which owns the land on which the herons nest) and the Slate River Working Group, which in 2019 adopted a voluntary no-float period in breeding season in an effort to curb human disturbance of this population of the largest semi-aquatic waterbird species in North America. Bartholomew's work will document the birds' life cycles and demographics, use of foraging habitat, heron movement to and from the heronry,

presence of predators, effects of human activity and other elements.

CLIMATE STRESS MARKERS WITHIN BIRD DNA

Recipient: **Noelle Mason**, Colorado State University (Kristen Ruegg), \$525

Title: *Rate of Avian Telomere Shortening Across DNA Sample Types*

Genome-protecting areas of DNA called *telomeres* also serve as markers for birds' lifespan, and Mason aims to measure telomere changes as "an ideal proxy" for "avian life history events," including how birds respond to human-caused stresses such as climate change. Her research seeks to compare telomeres' rate of change (growing shorter) by sampling blood and body and tail feathers.

"My work in quantifying the correlation between telomere length in blood vs. feathers," Mason wrote, "will add to a body of work helping other avian researchers" understand the effect of human environmental stress on the health and lifespan of birds. Her project includes an educational component by creating the Fort Collins Feederwatch program at CSU's Environmental Learning Center. A feeder complex there allows her to sample individual birds during the study. It will remain in place afterwards for continuing citizen science and education uses, such as seasonal bird counts and surveys with the Cornell Lab's North American Feederwatch program, a field site for CSU undergraduate and graduate ornithology courses (starting in spring 2022) and Bird Camp, a multiday summer program for middle schoolers run by CSU ornithologist **Kristen Ruegg**.

HOUSE WREN HYBRIDS

Recipient: **William Church Anderson**, University of Colorado Boulder (Scott Taylor), \$1,000

Title: *Hybridization between nonsister lineages of House Wren (Troglodytes aedon) along the Front Range of Colorado*

Anderson's DNA-focused project seeks to examine "underlying evolutionary forces" at work among hybridized House Wrens within a Front Range mixing zone of the species' eastern and western forms, which possess varied plumages and calls. He

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notes that House Wrens are already “incredibly diverse,” with 32 subspecies and the largest breeding range of any New World songbird. In the U.S., the western form most closely relates to those found in the western mountains of Mexico, while the eastern form has more ancestral ties to Central American wrens.

Is gene flow among House Wrens in the Colorado “contact zone” having a “homogenizing” effect on the two lineages? Might Anderson’s exploration here open a window into House Wren evolution and the maintenance of “reproductive barriers” within the species? He believes it could “fill a considerable knowledge gap.”

To find out, he will sequence the DNA in samples collected from about 70 House Wrens in the greater Denver area. In addition, samples from more than 25 House Wrens from outside the hybridization zone will represent “parental” genetics of the purely western and eastern forms to help characterize their mixing in Colorado. The project also takes advantage of the CU Boulder Chickadee Study’s infrastructure of nest boxes (some inhabited each year by opportunistic wrens) that span from within the city to foothills and mountain locations to the west.

NON-NATIVE TREES AND CHICKADEE FOOD

Recipient: **Cori Carver**, University of Colorado Boulder (Kathryn Grabenstein, Scott Taylor), \$1,485
Title: *Exploring the Effects of Non-native Tree Species on Chickadee Nestling Diet*

Carver, a previous DFO grantee in 2020 for an earlier phase of her research in the ongoing CU Boulder Chickadee Study, made a DFO special presentation via Zoom last March on the work thus far. She is investigating what effect urban and suburban changes in the Front Range treescape may have on the insect-rich diet that Black-capped and Mountain Chickadee parents provide for their nestlings. For millennia, the birds survived on insects associated with the region’s native trees and shrubs. The question now is how and whether the urbanizing shift to non-native flora (and non-native insects that inhabit them) affects young chickadee diets and, ultimately, reproductive success for the species.

The 2021 phase of work is largely laboratory-focused as Carver sequences fecal samples of chickadee nestlings taken in the field in 2020 for the makeup of different insects in their diets. The research results may help calculate the costs and benefits of non-native and native trees on native Colorado songbirds along the Front Range.

CHICKADEE DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN FRONT RANGE

Recipient: **Mia Larrieu**, University of Colorado Boulder (Scott Taylor), \$2,000

Title: *Exploring the Effects of Urbanization and Elevation on Chickadee Nestling Development*

As another facet of the ongoing CU Boulder Chickadee Study, Larrieu’s project explores urbanization’s effects on chickadee nestling development along an elevation gradient of urban to rural locations between the Boulder campus and Nederland, CO. This research examines how “different levels of urban disturbance” by humans may affect Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, as well as what hybridization and elevation’s effects may have on these species as their ranges shift in response to changing climate.

Larrieu hypothesizes that regardless of species, chickadees will develop faster in low-elevation urban areas than high-elevation rural locations, though Black-capped also have generally faster development than Mountain. Her field work includes observing adult breeding behavior differences in urbanized areas vs. rural, and weighing, measuring, banding, and collecting blood and feather samples from nestlings at different locations along the urban-to-rural elevation and activity gradient.

The project relies on CU Boulder’s network of about 400 nest boxes in a development corridor ranging from the campus’s urban setting up through the foothills to the university’s rural Mountain Research Station near Nederland. She set up cameras at randomly selected nest boxes last spring and has been gathering nesting data this summer.



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:

Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2021

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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New field trip chair
is David Suddjian

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PROGRAM NEWS

1st in-person monthly
program + livestream!

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BIRD BEHAVIOR

Silent summer:
Where are the birds?

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BIRD ARCHAEOLOGY

Birds + ancient pueblos =
cool webinar series

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs

📷 Mark Amershek

📍 Barr Lake State Park





FROM THE PRESIDENT

DFO Board retreat? I'd call it an ADVANCE!

Susan Blansett

On a Sunday morning in mid-August, the DFO Board of Directors convened for its third planning retreat since 2016. Once again, we gathered at Barr Lake State Park, a lovely place of refuge where we stepped back to consider the big picture and chart our club's path for the next few years.

The last time we did this, in the fall of 2019, we crafted a strategic plan for 2-3 years ahead. But that was just 5 months before *you-know-what* all but shut us down for a full year. In hopes of returning to "normal" again soon, we thought it wise to review and update that Covid-interrupted plan.

First, we took a short hike out on the park's Neidrach Nature Trail to fill our lungs with (relatively smoke-free) fresh air and our eyes with birds. Back in the park nature center education room, we filled our coffee cups and got to work.

Before moving into the main group-think session, we did a bit of DFO business, including appointing a new Field Trip Committee chair. Thank you and welcome to veteran trip leader **David Suddjian**, who in this critical role will also sit on the DFO Board. *(Read more about David and his vision for DFO field trips in the article on page 8 of this issue.)*

The strategic plan we drew up in 2019 focused on four key goals. We recommitted to them as still meaningful, even as we recognize that we're in a different world now. Those goals are:

- Integrate conservation into everything we do
- Attract new and more diverse members
- Improve the quality of DFO members' experience
- Build partnerships with other organizations to promote conservation and enhance member value

We added a fifth goal: Ensure and improve DFO's financial health in the fiscal areas of management, revenue, fundraising and reserves.

It was a pleasant surprise to find that, despite the pandemic

(and sometimes because of it), DFO has made positive momentum since 2019. We celebrated these milestones:

- Our new Conservation Committee has delved into public discussion and advocacy on the future of birding at Chico Basin Ranch and birder access to State Wildlife Areas. It now raises its voice on conservation topics in each issue of *The Lark Bunting*, and it's working on more issues and causes to come
- We set a new membership record, now at 549 and counting
- DFO mastered Zoom to continue monthly programs online through the pandemic. This doubled, tripled and even quadrupled normal attendance AND exposed new audiences (and potential members) to DFO
- We formed new program partnerships with Denver Public Library, Denver Audubon, and the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History
- We expanded our media reach, with steady growth in our Facebook and Instagram communities and, in my opinion, the BEST newsletter of any nonprofit EVER
- DFO restarted a program of popular, free and varied field trips that is widely recognized as a model for birding clubs across the country
- Thanks to continued member generosity, we expanded our thriving program of small grants to conservation-based, bird-related research and education

With the bar set that high, the board spent the bulk of our retreat time working on how to do even better: continue to grow, appeal to broader audiences, bring members even more value AND engage more of you in volunteering for the club.

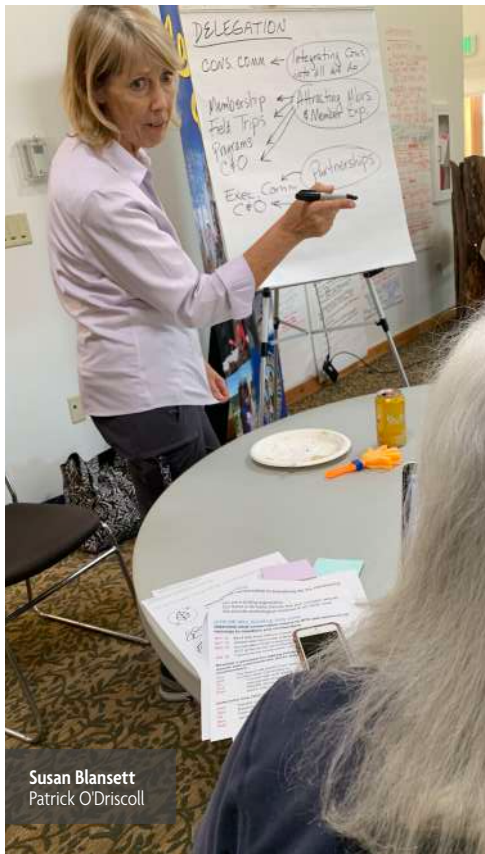
Here are some ways we'll work for that in the coming months:

- Under David Suddjian's new leadership, we have already recruited and trained four new field trip leaders and aim to add more, while expanding both the numbers and kinds of birding outings that DFO offers

Continued on page 3



DFO board retreat
Patrick O'Driscoll



Susan Blansett
Patrick O'Driscoll

- We will promote more member engagement in club activities and appreciation for those who volunteer their skills and talents to DFO
- We are planning more Better Birding Workshops, including some focused on bird habitat (an idea straight from last year's member survey)
- We aim to deepen member involvement in community science, including the HawkWatch program that DFO took on more than a year ago

So, while you enjoy shorebird migration, the fall passage of warblers and (soon, please?) those first bites of crisp autumn air, know that there's more to come. And while you consider that, tell a friend or two about DFO, won't you? Thank your trip leader or other club volunteers, too. Come to the Members-Only Picnic on Sept. 18! A smart, giving group of club volunteers is committed to bringing you the very best that birding together as a Colorado community can offer.

Thanks, and good birding!

— Susan

A return to in-person programs . . . plus live streaming from home!

Beginning Sept. 27, Denver Field Ornithologists returns to in-person monthly programs for the first time in more than a year and a half. This program, in which DFO member **Scott Somershoe** updates his 2021 bicycle birding odyssey to raise funds for avian research, will be live in the **Unity Spiritual Center Denver** — and livestreamed via YouTube for those who prefer to attend remotely.

An important note for those attending in person:

Unity Denver's Covid-19 protocols strongly encourage **wearing masks and social distancing** in the church's sanctuary. It has abundant seating (capacity 330) and can easily accommodate this simple adjustment as the need for commonsense precautions lingers until recent surge conditions subside. We ask that you honor this sensible practice by bringing a mask and sitting apart from others beyond your own close circle.

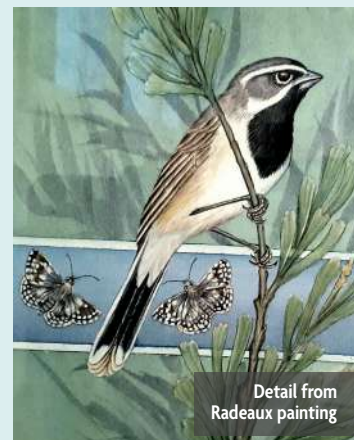
For those of you attending remotely, tuning in at DFO's YouTube Channel is easy. There's no need to register or launch a computer app. Here's what to do: At or before the 7 p.m. MDT start time, open your computer, smart phone or other Internet device and click on the DFO YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFqZeYj0BHP-EuNxjb4bthQ>. (While you're there, click on "SUBSCRIBE" to find it easily next time.) That's it! You're watching live.

If you miss the program, DFO's YouTube Channel will store the recording, which also will be archived via link on the DFO website's Past Programs page.

A FINAL NOTE:

Because of sometimes-shifting official guidance around Covid-19 precautions indoors, arrangements for in-person DFO programs this fall are **subject to change**. If that happens, DFO will inform all members **via email** (as we do now to announce programs) and will **post updates** on the DFO website, Facebook, and Instagram pages.

Programs will not be canceled, only readjusted if necessary.



Detail from
Radeaux painting

Come in person for chance at bird painting

Denver Field Ornithologists will celebrate its return to in-person monthly program meetings in September with a special door prize that one lucky attendee will take home.

It's an original and stylized painting of a Black-throated Sparrow (with butterflies) by the accomplished painter, illustrator and birder **Radeaux** of Pueblo, CO. Among his many other artworks focused on the fauna of Colorado, **Radeaux** created the illustrations and painted the covers of the *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas*.

The 8-1/2-by-11-inch painting, mounted and matted in a 15-by-18-inch art frame, was donated to DFO by the family of a former club member after his death in 2019.

Anyone attending the Sept. 27 evening program at Unity Spiritual Center Denver will be eligible for the drawing.

Good luck!



A Green Big Year: My 2021 birding quest for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant

Scott Somershoe

Monday, September 27, 7 p.m. MDT

LIVE in person at [Unity Spiritual Center Denver](#)

STREAMING LIVE on [DFO's YouTube Channel](#)

On Sept. 27, DFO's own **Scott Somershoe** will tell the story of his "Joe Roller Memorial Green Big Year" so far — a self-powered, carbon-free mission to record as many species in Colorado as possible, but only by bicycle or on foot from his home in Littleton. When he began on Jan. 1, 2021, Somershoe was aiming for at least 250 species, six more than he recorded in a similar year-long pursuit in 2020.

As of Aug. 31, he has already reached 251 species — and so Scott has a new goal with four months left in 2021. As autumn migration begins, he has set sights on more than two dozen target species in the categories of "common" or "rare but regular" visitors to Colorado. "I can't wait for fall migration," he told followers on his [Joe Roller Memorial Green Big Year blog](#). "It'll be a blast!"

The species tally is important because Somershoe is gathering per-species pledges and flat donations for the new Joe Roller Memorial Grant for bird research in Colorado. He and Colorado Field Ornithologists established the fund in tribute to **Joe Roller**, the longtime Colorado birder and ambassador for birding (and member of both DFO and CFO) who died last November. If he can pass 265 species, he could end up raising \$30,000 for the grant fund.

Somershoe is land birds coordinator for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. To follow his Green Big Year endeavor (and to pledge a donation), visit his blog at <https://jrmemorialgreenbigyear.blogspot.com/>.



The Internet of Wings: How the data revolution is about to change the way you bird

Nathan Pieplow

Monday, October 25, 7 p.m. MDT

LIVE in person at [Unity Spiritual Center Denver](#)

STREAMING LIVE on [DFO's YouTube Channel](#)

What if your phone could pick out rarities for you from a flock of birds? What if it could tell you exactly where an individual migrant came from and where it is going? These technologies already exist, or soon will — and **Nathan Pieplow**, one of Colorado's foremost birders, has plenty to say about them.

Continued on page 6

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEWS CONT.

In this presentation at DFO's Oct. 25 evening program meeting, Pieplow will discuss how cutting-edge innovations in bird tracking and automatic identification can enhance conservation, supercharge citizen science, and broaden the appeal of birding.

You'll learn how the song of a White-crowned Sparrow communicates not just its species identity, but its street address. You'll learn what happened when a flock of curlews ran into a snowstorm, and how we know. And you'll learn how YOU can collect the data needed to reverse declines in bird populations.

A former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' *Colorado Birds* quarterly journal, he is the author of the two volumes of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* for both western and eastern North America. Pieplow's day job is assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. A man of multiple talents, he even dabbles in graphic design. He won the National Association of Science Writers contest last year to design its ScienceWriters2020 conference logo.

A native of South Dakota, he grew up fascinated by birds and has been an intense student of bird sounds for 18 years. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail website](#).

Look for more details about his October presentation in next month's issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



From “Crazy French” to Fishers Peak: Colorado’s newest state park

Crystal Dreiling

Monday, November 22, 7 p.m. MST

Last October, Fishers Peak State Park became the newest of Colorado's 42 state parks. With dense, wildlife-rich forests, grasslands, foothills and mesas in the mountainous southern borderlands outside Trinidad, the park opened in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with public access to only a tiny, 250-acre patch of its 19,200 total acres.

At the time, **Crystal Dreiling**, park manager of both Fishers Peak and nearby Trinidad Lake State Park, said the goal was “to give everyone a taste of the hiking, hunting, wildlife watching and more that will be available once the park is fully developed in coming years.” Fishers Peak is the result of a partnership among the state, the Trust for Public Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the local Trinidad community, among others.

Join Dreiling in DFO's final monthly evening program of 2021 to learn more about Fishers Peak SP's origins (locals called it Crazy French Ranch), what's open now and what's ahead, and the new park's prospects for birders (68 species in just 21 eBird reports from the Fishers Peak's Moore Canyon hotspot since May 2020).

Look for more details about her November presentation in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Birds 'n' Brats: DFO picnic is Saturday, Sept. 18!

The fifth Denver Field Ornithologists Members-Only Summer Picnic is almost here. We'll gather 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 18 in a great birding destination: Prospect Park in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Arrive early (7:30 a.m.) and join fellow DFO members for some birding along Clear Creek and around the greenbelt lakes before chow time.

If you haven't RSVP'd yet, here's the Google form sent to all members last month: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefxnDvajFsZe8d8SsCLAT7plbhvKQhQZ8lhvDXhx7AMRn41A/viewform>

DFO's first opportunity since March 2020 for club fellowship in person beyond field trips will feature the usual bratwurst-and-veggie-dog roast (with potluck salads, side dishes and desserts brought by the members). We'll cook, eat and commune together at tables in the park's covered picnic pavilion, scene of our last club cookout in 2019. Prospect Park is located off 44th Avenue and Robb Street west of Kipling in Wheat Ridge, CO 80033. Paths throughout the park are paved and accessible.

More details:

- As previously, the picnic is free to all DFO members and families or "plus-1" guests, though voluntary donations to the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Grants Fund are welcome
- DFO will bring and grill bratwurst and veggie dogs and supply the beverages
- Eating begins at 11 a.m., with pre-picnic birding walks in the greenbelt to begin at 7:30 a.m.
- Picnic attendees will be asked to bring potluck fare to share with six people or more. Dish categories are assigned in alphabetical groupings by last name:
 - » Salads (**R – Z**)
 - » Side dishes (**A – H**)
 - » Desserts (**I – Q**)

Come join us on Sept. 18, won't you?

A reminder that voluntary contributions to DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Grants Fund go to worthy projects in:

- Education that supports knowledge of birds
- Research in ornithology
- Conservation of birds and their habitats

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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DFO's most prolific field trip leader is new chair

Patrick O'Driscoll

Perhaps it was inevitable that **David Suddjian** would assume a leadership role over DFO's most popular activity. Having led more than 160 field trips over the past five years — from his Ken Caryl Valley backyard to far-flung Eastern Plains and Western Slope locales — Suddjian knows the drill. His trips regularly fill to capacity, too. Beginners and veterans alike come away knowing something new.

In early August, the DFO Board unanimously confirmed him as the club's new Field Trip chair, succeeding **Karen von Saltza**, who retired May 31 after a decade as field trips director. "I saw the gap that was there, and it didn't seem like anybody was stepping up," Suddjian (pronounced *SUHD-gin*) said with a vocal shrug. "I want to see things grow."

The day he spoke those words, one week after the board vote, Suddjian had just staged a formal training for four new DFO field trip leaders under the tutelage of leader-trainers **Chuck Hundertmark** and **Gregg Goodrich**. "One is going to do an October trip, and maybe others, too," he told *The Lark Bunting*. "We've re-started well."

For Suddjian, taking over just as DFO has emerged from more than a year without in-person trips is an opportunity to review and refine the club's niche in the Colorado birding community. "We were set back by Covid, but I still feel (the pandemic) spurred DFO on to a bigger effort," he said. "DFO has a unique program of field trips — how they are set up logistically with the website, the numbers, how many there are and generally of good quality. And they're free. It's pretty fun to be involved with that. I like to lead field trips."

Suddjian even suggested to his interviewer a new trip-focused feature for *The Lark Bunting*: a monthly review by a leader or participant about a recent and notable DFO trip. (He is persuasive: We're calling it **Field Tripping**, and the first one is on page 10 of this issue.)

Suddjian, who grew up in Palo Alto, CA, moved to the bayside town of Capitola, CA in the mid-1980s while attending college nearby at the University of California-Santa Cruz. He lived and birded from the Monterey Bay region until moving to Colorado in late 2013. About the same time, he joined DFO.

He did not lead a club field trip, though, until nearly three years later. "**Joe Roller** got me involved," Suddjian said, invoking the late Colorado birding legend who had an eye for talent and recruited volunteers tirelessly for both DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists. That first trip, in October 2016, was to Chatfield State Park. "We had a jaeger fly by," he said, dipping into an encyclopedic recall of his outings. "My 150th (field trip) was March 2, 2020, just before Covid."

Many of those trips came during DFO's largest group birding effort ever: the club's 2018 DFO Big Year, which Suddjian organized and carried out to wide acclaim. The numbers were impressive: 361 species recorded by hundreds of participants on 230 total club field trips — a bird for virtually every day of the year, on trips that went out an average of every 1.6 days. The reach was impressive, too. DFO trips visited 54 of Colorado's 64 counties, 19 of them for the first time. Eighteen trips were overnights. DFO added 33 new state birds to its own Colorado "life list," which grew to 417. Forty-two different leaders led field outings. In all, the trips generated 1,621 eBird checklists.

"People maintained interest around it. Our trips were growth generators," Suddjian said. That was in sync with part of his philosophy as a trip leader: enhancing participants' experiences. "To me, it means not only seeing a lot of birds and having a good time," he said, "but also learning about our avian resources and becoming a better birder."

Continued on page 9



David Suddjian
Patrick O'Driscoll



Suddjian in the field
Patrick O'Driscoll

Another part is using field trips to build DFO's ranks. "While our trips are popular and often full, they're not great in connecting to new members," said Suddjian, who wants to target "the developing birder, which most birders are." ("I'm a developing birder," he added, to his interviewer's disbelief, "just further along than some.")

He'd like to see more DFO trips presented in just that way — more inviting to developing birders. "I'm not sure how that gets nuanced and presented, maybe through the attitude of the leader," he continued. "It's an important part of what I'd like to try."

That could include heading into the field "with a sense of adventure," even on routine outings. "Each time's different. Impromptu is a fun word," he said. "We can always change it up (on a trip)." He would also like trip leaders to redouble their effort to make every DFO trip "as open and welcoming" as possible. "Some people are a bit intimidated, I've learned, on field trips."

Finally, Suddjian floated the idea of building a collection of short video presentations to reinforce and complement field trips on topics for the developing-birder audience: "Like, for right now, it could be something that focuses on five warblers that we'll see during fall migration — but a wide list of topics: winter waterfowl, how to approach birding at a reservoir, the foothills bird community in spring. If you're going to learn about the birds, you need to learn their communities."

So, that was Week 1 with David Suddjian as DFO Field Trip chair. Need we say, stay tuned for more?

Field trips? Check the website!

Just a reminder:

The Lark Bunting no longer carries the list of new upcoming Denver Field Ornithologists field trips and their descriptions.

All of those (and more) are available at the same place you sign up for our outings: The Upcoming Field Trips pages of the DFO website. Check out the new trips for October and the rest for September now! Go to <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>

FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping: First-time prospecting in Pitkin

*Editor's note: This introduces **Field Tripping**, a new regular feature in The Lark Bunting in which members, whether trip leaders or participants, share their experience of a recent DFO field trip of note. Want to share your tale from the DFO trail? Contact **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of The Lark Bunting, at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

.....

The trip: Pitkin County, CO / Lake County, CO

Date: Tuesday, Aug. 10

Leader: David Suddjian + six participants

.....

Donna Stumpp

I've recently started county birding, seeking and tracking birds within each of the 64 counties in Colorado. Because I'd never birded in Pitkin County, I jumped at this trip when it came up on the DFO website's Field Trip page: our club's first-ever field trip there! It would be a long day, but I thought it would be the perfect way to explore birds in the area around Aspen for the first time. I was not disappointed.

En route to climbing Independence Pass into Pitkin, we stopped first at tiny Twin Lakes (population 171) in Lake County. I had birded before in this tiny town with historic homes, but I was unprepared for hummingbirds by the dozens! A couple of homes keep several feeders filled with nectar, and arriving at one of them just before 7 a.m., we counted 30-40 Broad-tailed and a handful of Rufous Hummingbirds! So many, racing in and chasing out — it was incredible. Between the two houses, we logged 60 Broad-tailed and 10 Rufous, plus 30 Evening Grosbeaks! I'd never seen so many of those before, either. And our day had barely begun . . .

Atop Independence Pass, we paused to observe Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep families with young along the narrow road. Descending the other side, we stopped at Lost Man Campground and Trail. Birding along the trail started slowly, but we were all surprised by the abundance of colorful and unusually shaped varieties of mushrooms. After crossing the road to explore the campground, I spotted my first Red Crossbill of the season. David identified it by call as a Type 5, or Lodgepole Pine variety.

Moving on at about 10 a.m., we pulled into [Difficult Campground](#) about 5 miles southeast of Aspen. The "Difficult" name did not match the terrain, as our access was easy and flat. With a small

creek running through willows into a stunning valley, the habitat drew a variety of birds, including Swainson's Thrush (a good "county bird" on my first visit). As our day hit the halfway point, I was energized by the species we had already seen. Good thing, because we still had lots more ground to cover before a long drive home.

Our first stop in Aspen, the Pitkin County seat, was the [Aspen Center for Environmental Studies](#). I'd been curious about this location ever since noticing several rare bird sightings there over the past year. As we pulled in, the trees and shrubs were thick, and the paths were well-worn but irregular and natural. The center buildings looked more like the cottages I'd seen once at a forest retreat in California near the Pacific: friendly, rough, simple. What an exciting place to explore, never knowing what we might find tucked within all the greenery. No wonder those rare and out-of-season birds stopped here to rest. We didn't see any of those this day, but we did add 10 more county birds to our list, including Belted Kingfisher, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Evening Grosbeak.

We finished up DFO's first trip to Pitkin County in [Wilton Jaffee Sr. Park](#), a county park also in Aspen. It's a narrow stretch of land, nestled along the Roaring Fork River. The dippers were out of sight this day, but we did find a Dusky Flycatcher and Western Wood-Pewee to add to the list. In all, we saw 39 species in Pitkin and 19 in Twin Lakes in Lake County. I came home with so many new county birds! I also enjoyed exploring new places, the beautiful landscape, and the opportunity to get better acquainted with my fellow field trip travelers. Thanks go to David for leading such an enjoyable and fruitful outing.



Twin Lakes hummingbirds (Donna Stumpp), Pitkin trip group (Susan Suddjian)

BIRD BEHAVIOR

Seasonal upheaval? Colorado's late spring, silent summer, quiet fall . . .

David Suddjian

I can't find a Yellow Warbler! It is the end of August as I write this — and this familiar bird should be our most common migrant warbler now. I expect to find one on every outing to good riparian habitat near my Ken Caryl Valley home in Jefferson County.

Yellow Warbler usually nests here (though not this year) and is a common late summer migrant (but not this year). This August, I did not see a single one near my home, where the riparian habitat of Massey Draw has attracted migrant Yellows regularly. In fact, by what I've seen, their scarcity is just the tip of the iceberg.

Many species are scarce now in a quiet start of fall migration throughout the Ken Caryl area. I took a birding walk on Aug. 28 in a productive grassland and foothill scrub area at Ken Caryl's hogbacks, and I was struck yet again by how few birds were around: 15 individuals of eight species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S93838068>). For comparison, five years ago, on Sept. 2, 2016, I found 145 individual birds of 26 species on the same walk (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S31425922>). This is but one example of many I could share.

And it has been this way since last spring. Where were the birds? Spring 2021 was late and slow to unfold in various natural respects, with leafing out of trees and flowering delayed, often by 2-3 weeks. Land birds came late, too. The return of spring migrants is something we all watch for, right?

Hummingbirds are especially exciting to welcome back, arriving early among our land bird migrants. From 2014 to 2020, Broad-tailed Hummingbirds returned to my yard consistently in the second week of April, averaging April 12. This year, my hummingbird feeders sat unvisited until we saw the first on April 25, two weeks tardy. With late arrivals came lower numbers of hummers near my home, especially during the usual summer peak in August. My feeders usually attract good numbers of both Broad-tailed and Rufous Hummingbirds in late summer. In the third week of August, I average 9.3 total hummingbirds in my yard (60 percent Broad-tailed) for every eBird checklist. But this year, the third week average dropped to just 3.3 hummers, 34 percent of the 4-year average.

This was the disturbing reality from May through August this year for many, though not all land bird species. Generally, birders noticed the late spring arrival and then the dearth of spring and summer individuals in yards and out on birding excursions. Those of us engaged in standardized counts and studies — the Colorado Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), bird banding at several Front Range stations, and other measures — also saw a slow and late spring become a rather silent summer. Birders noticed changes among a variety of locales, habitats and species, too, from high-country elevations to the prairie, from forests to grasslands, and from sparrows to warblers to flycatchers. Last spring and this summer, I traveled widely across western Colorado. Again and again, I found myself scraping to find birds.

Mountain Bluebirds, usually abundant, seemed scarce everywhere this year. Their migration was slow in spring, and many areas where they nest had none or fewer than usual. In Ken Caryl Valley, only about 20 percent of their usual territories were occupied. On trips to Park County, where they are common breeders, I found no Mountain Bluebirds at all in many areas, and only scattered nesting pairs. On one visit in mid-April, I found only 15 percent of what I counted on the same date in previous Park County visits. The paucity of these bluebirds was evident on Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes, too.

Continued on page 12



Yellow Warbler
Jim Esten



Mountain Bluebird
David Prentice

The BBS is an annual, continent-wide monitoring program that tracks population trends based on samples taken at designated stops along the same roadside routes each year. I surveyed seven BBS routes this June and early July, and results from five of them revealed this season's low numbers for some species that commonly breed there. This table lists those species either missing or present in notably low numbers this year on those five routes.

Selected species noted in low numbers along five Colorado BBS routes in 2021, shown as percent of recent 5-year average
 (" -- " indicates species not normally found on that route)

	Powderhorn	Mt Evans	Guffey	Guanella Pass	Paonia
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	16 percent	7 percent	30 percent	22 percent	Missing
Steller's Jay	Missing	Missing	61	Missing	--
Mountain Chickadee	Missing	45	22	20	--
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Missing	Missing	27	Missing	Missing
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	16	48	42	24	--
Western Bluebird	Missing	--	21	--	--
Mountain Bluebird	21	--	28	Missing	8
Pine Siskin	12	9	20	Missing	--
Chipping Sparrow	Missing	--	12	--	Missing
Audubon's Warbler	30	41	16	32	--

As you can see, Mountain Bluebirds were low on all of these, and other forest and woodland birds were also sparse, both residents and migrants. From my sample of routes, upper-elevation habitats seemed especially affected. On many of my survey stops this summer, I detected no birds at all. That's never happened to me before in many years of traveling BBS routes. (Am I going deaf and blind as I go gray?!)

What, if anything, does all this mean? It's hard to know what to make of the dramatic changes I have noted here. Are they real? What events or factors might cause such reductions to so many species in so many (but not all) settings?

Colorado birders have been talking anecdotally about this since spring, whether on the CoBirds listserv, together in the field, in comments with our eBird lists, or other forums. Theories abound: the extensive and chronic western wildfires (both habitat loss and the effect of smoke on species), drought, that early and cold storm that hit the region Sept. 8, 2020, the record cold south of the Colorado border last February, and more.

No doubt multiple factors are at play, but which ones? I can't answer that, but the data I've gathered allow me to notice things — and clearly, they show changes. These data I have gathered, whether in eBird or for the BBS, are part of the public scientific record. I hope others more capable than I might use this information to tell us more about the what and the why.

The eBird data that ardent birders collect every time we go birding, even in or near our own backyards, become part of a bigger picture. Continuing to observe changes in bird populations and to collect and report data will raise awareness of changes among the birds we follow. I trust that what we notice (and record) will eventually help answer these vexing questions.

CONSERVATION ESSAY

12 Tips for '21: Today's word is . . . plastics

Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists is not only about enjoying and learning about birds. It's also about protecting them and their habitats. 12 for '21 aims to inform readers of The Lark Bunting about bird conservation actions you can incorporate into your daily life. Look for tips from members of DFO's Conservation Committee in each newsletter throughout 2021.

Sharon Tinianow

"I just want to say one word to you — just one word . . . are you listening? Plastics. There's a great future in plastics. Will you think about it?"

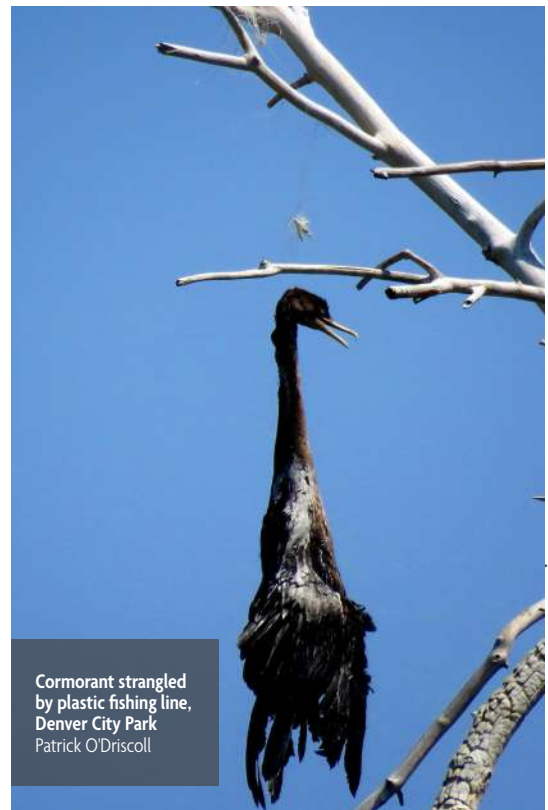
— From *The Graduate*, 1967

Strong, lightweight, and flexible, the synthetic polymers we call "plastics" have saturated our world and changed the way we live. In many cases, plastics have made our lives better. The invention of Bakelite in 1907 to replace shellac as an insulator enabled the rapid expansion of electricity in the U.S. Nylon came on the scene in 1935 to replace silk in parachutes, and plexiglass was invented to replace glass in aircraft windows. Both were important innovations for the military in World War II. Plastic production increased 300 percent during the war, and that surge continued in the years following. In one product after another, plastics were adopted to replace traditional materials.

But, by the time **Dustin Hoffman's** young Benjamin was urged to consider a career in plastics in the film *The Graduate*, their reputation had already been tarnished. Plastic debris was spotted in the ocean in the 1960s. Through the 1970s and 1980s, concern grew about the persistence of plastics in the environment, even as their use rose dramatically for five decades. Fast forward to today and the statistics are horrifying, particularly for birds:

- Plastic has been found in 60 percent of all seabird species and 100 percent of all sea turtle species
- Plastic litter on beach habitat on the Gulf Coast threatens already vulnerable species that nest there, like the Snowy Plover and Wilson's Plover
- Plastic is being found in the gut of water bird species, including American Oystercatchers, Kelp Gulls, Red Phalaropes, and Common Eiders
- Plastic fishing line (aka monofilament line) poses a threat to birds who become entangled and are unable to free themselves

What can and should we do about this? The plastics industry addressed the problem with recycling, urging municipalities to collect and recycle plastic waste. But recycling is far from a perfect solution. It varies widely from place to place, and some areas of the U.S. having no recycling at all. Even in cities with well-developed recycling programs like Denver's, effectiveness still relies on participation by those who may or may not bother to dispose of plastics properly.



Continued on page 14



12 TIPS *cont from page 13*

In the end, 18 BILLION more pounds of plastic waste ends up in the ocean every year. In landlocked Colorado, it may seem that this isn't a problem we contribute to. In reality, plastic travels down our waterways, and recyclable plastics are often shipped to other countries for recycling. Importantly, our choices as consumers influence plastics in the environment.

There is some good news on the production side. Innovations under research may make them safer and fully biodegradable. Meanwhile, all of us can urge our local governments to seek more effective ways to recycle. Environmental groups like the Sierra Club advocate for regulatory change to reduce how much new plastic can be produced.

It is worth thinking twice about plastics in our homes and seeking alternatives. This summer, tons of good advice landed in my email inbox during [Plastic Free July](#), a global movement to inspire everyone to be part of the solution to plastic pollution. Here is a summary of steps for individuals, from the easiest to the most challenging:

- **Stop using single-use plastics.** This is the single most important thing you can do! Take a reusable bag with you when you shop (you'll also avoid the bag fee that Denver and many other cities have adopted). When you order food to go, tell the restaurant to hold the plastic cutlery. Better, get your carry-out meals from restaurants that use recyclable or compostable containers. Take your own reusable coffee cup and/or water bottle whenever you leave home. Say "no" to the plastic straw or bring your own metal or recyclable one. Learn [How to Create Your Own Zero Waste Kit](#) and carry it with you.
- **Reuse plastics.** Plastic baggies and containers can be washed and reused. Bring your own when you buy bulk foods at the grocery.

- **Seek out alternatives.** More products are coming on the market daily to replace plastic packaging. At the supermarket, choose foods packaged in recyclable cardboard or glass over those in plastic. Ditch liquid shampoo and conditioner for shampoo and conditioner bars. Replace liquid laundry detergent with powder or detergent sheets. Choose [tubeless Bites](#) instead of traditional toothpaste. Try reusable food-storage wraps like [Bees Wrap](#) instead of plastic film. Abandon balloons for party decorations. Pay attention to mail-order shipping practices; use vendors who avoid bubble wrap and foam packing.
- **Recycle whatever you can.** Check the guidelines for what can be recycled in your municipality. Some plastics labeled as recyclable may not be accepted. Sign up for municipal composting if available. That helps clear the way for more food purveyors to use compostable packaging instead of single-use plastics.
- **Pick up plastic trash and dispose of it properly (especially fishing line).** Carry a trash bag with you while birding and (carefully) pick up abandoned plastic wherever you find it.

Good information is abundant and available about how plastics threaten bird life and what you can do to help. Here are several good articles to start:

- [Plastic Ingestion by Birds](#)
- [Plastic Forms an Enduring Threat to Seabirds](#)
- [Plastic Threatens Even Our Most Common Shorebirds, Study Warns](#)
- [History and Future of Plastics](#)
- [Easy Tips to Ease off Plastic](#)



Screen grab from program

AUGUST PROGRAM REVIEW

In Costa Rica's tropical tourism paradise, birds, birds, and more birds

Patrick O'Driscoll

"Costa Rica is about birds . . . and much more," veteran Costa Rican birding guide **Max Vindas** asserted at the start of his Zoom presentation for DFO's monthly evening program Aug. 23. Moving on to explain "why much more," he delivered a smooth tourism pitch that would have done a travel agent or chamber of commerce proud.

Mixing his live on-screen spiel with video clips of himself in a cloud forest with exotic birdsong just off-camera, Vindas front-loaded the program with an encyclopedic litany of superlatives about his native land — 98 percent literacy in a population of 5 million, 98 percent powered by renewable energy, oldest democracy in Latin America, more than half the country's 30,000 square miles protected in 28 national parks, 134 reserves and 53 refuges. He touted the lush scenery, matchless sightseeing (waterfalls to volcanoes), abundant infrastructure and trails both short and long for birding, and myriad other diversions: zip-lining, river rafting, hot springs, other wildlife (sloths and monkeys, whales and sea turtles), jungle lodges, fine dining, etc.

Although this initial stream of sightseer-travelogue patter set something of a promotional tone for the evening, Vindas soon turned to what DFO viewers were salivating for: Rich birding intel, expertly delivered, with lots of gorgeous photos of some of the nearly 950 avian species found in a country less than one-quarter the size of Colorado.

View the complete video of
"Aves de Pura Vida: Birding in Costa Rica"
 in DFO's Past Programs archive:
<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

Vindas, a senior naturalist guide for [Horizontes Nature Tours](#), clearly knows his stuff. He led his audience on a detailed odyssey through some of Costa Rica's six distinct "bird fauna" regions, with tips and facts about their key avian species and why each is a destination in itself. The changes in elevation, precipitation, topography, flora and birds aren't just dramatic, he said, but "drastic." Vindas recalled a time he was guiding clients from one region to another, and one of his guests remarked, "Max, it seems to me that we have changed countries!"

Vindas added that even days spent driving between key birding destinations (often the duller part of excursions elsewhere) "are not just drives" in Costa Rica: "We go through incredible scenery, and sometimes the driving days are the best days for birds."

The avian riches are everywhere, from iconic travel-poster birds (Rainbow-billed Toucan, Scarlet Macaw) to dozens of kinds of tanagers, wrens, antbirds (antwrens, antshrikes and even ant-tanagers), hummingbirds, flycatchers and so many others. "It's like when somebody asks me, 'What's your favorite bird?', I really don't know what to say," he said. "It's very, very hard."

As you would expect in a presentation from the tropics, Vindas focused first on the rainforests (and, higher up, the mid-elevation cloud forests), both replete with splendid inhabitants. No, wait: Did he actually say "resplendent"?

Yes, he did. The [Resplendent Quetzal](#), all sumptuous color and impossibly long tail, is a must-see for any birder visiting Costa Rica. And yet, it is not Costa Rica's national bird. "I have to say, it is Guatemala's national bird," Vindas admitted, nodding to the Central American neighbor four countries to the north. He quickly added: "But if people want

Continued on page 16

to see a quetzal, you'd better come to Costa Rica . . . it is the best place to be able to see this bird." Better access, larger population.

Vindas mentioned other extraordinary rain and cloud forest birds, from Three-wattled Bellbird (yes, it sounds like a bell) to Bare-necked Umbrella Bird (picture an elegant crow with a pompadour hairdo). But he heaped praise upon an ordinary-looking rainforest bird with an extraordinary role. Thick-billed and olive green, the [Carmioli's Tanager](#) guides other birds (and birders) in the dark tropical depths. For safety in numbers, rainforest birds move in mixed flocks, and they seem to rely on this bird's loud and distinctive vocals to set the flock's pace and direction.

"It makes incredible vocalizations," Vindas said. "And so, whenever we hear a Carmioli's Tanager, we know a whole bunch of species is coming. We get all excited and ready because when you are in the middle of a mixed flock, you are on your own. I can shout out a few names and a few things, but it's just a whole bunch of birds coming through and you've got to see what you can."

Much higher up (above 6,000 feet), Costa Rica's highland forests contain "a huge amount of endemic species" found almost nowhere else and other rarities — Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, Timberline Wren ("a jewel in anybody's list"), and, especially, the [Golden-browed Chlorophonia](#). "It's one thing to see it there in that picture," he said, flashing on the screen an open-mouthed songbird in delicate yellow and green, elegantly trimmed in black and sky blue. "But when you gaze at it through your binoculars on a beautiful hike through the highlands of Costa Rica, it's an incredible bird to see, just astonishing."

More bird superlatives filled the rest of the presentation as Vindas visited the seasonally dry deciduous forest on the north Pacific side of the country, the mountainous south Pacific coast, the Caribbean east side and wetlands all over Costa Rica. Cameos included Turquoise Cotinga (breathtakingly blue), Orange-colored Manikin ("incredibly colorful"), Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager ("not found anywhere else on the planet"), American Pygmy Kingfisher ("the most beautiful jewel," hummingbird-sized), and many more.

During Q-and-A after his talk, it became clear why Vindas delivered his tourism pitch at the start. As in so many other destinations, the coronavirus pandemic hit Costa Rica's tourism industry heavily. "It was too long of a time without visitors," he said, noting that a number of lodges and other bird-centric properties have either closed or changed hands in the aftermath.

"The good thing is, we have a well-educated population, and it's very easy to have them wash their hands, wear their masks. We are well-behaved in that regard . . . we hope that in about a couple of months we'll have a fairly good portion of the population vaccinated . . . I think people feel comfortable again coming to Costa Rica."



Max Vindas in cloud forest video



Screen grab of toucan

DFO sets new membership mark: 548!

Patrick O'Driscoll

Whether it's pent-up, post-pandemic demand or some other factor, Denver Field Ornithologists is on a membership roll this summer. In early August, DFO set a new membership record: 548 paid-up members . . . and still counting.

The club's previous high was 547 members in 2018. But such upticks normally come earlier in the year, after the prior year-end enrollment and renewal rush is done and otherwise forgetful or delinquent stragglers clamber aboard once more.

The new member who put DFO's count over the top is **Susan Ballantine** of Denver. "My friend **Kathryn Smith** introduced me to DFO," she said when reached by *The Lark Bunting*. Adding a bit more about herself, Ballantine introduced us to a quaintly droll British expression for our kind — or at least some of us.

"I've been a casual 'twitcher' most of my life," she began, "having grown up in the English countryside and seaside. But since I retired 10 years ago, I've been combining my interest in birds with an increasing interest in photography."

Twitcher? Brits coined the term in the 1950s for obsessed birders more interested in chasing and listing every possible rarity than appreciating the birds themselves. The model was said to be **Howard Medhurst**, a quite driven chap known to twitch nervously in the field. "[Twitcher](#)" has since come to be applied casually to the rest of us, too.

Ballantine said she finds that birding "is also a great activity to do with my 8-year-old grandson, who has his own binoculars and record book."

Twitchever kind of birder you are, Susan, welcome to DFO!



Welcome to new DFO members

Susan Ballantine, Denver; Kathy Barnum, Denver; Nathan Bond, Denver; Jared Del Rosso, Centennial; Laura Hollenbaugh, Arvada; Roxanne Koehler, Denver; Marie "Cici" Lee, Elbert; Valentina Roumi, Boulder; Peter Ruprecht, Superior; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell, Marshfield, WI.

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Bea Weaver

Birds + ancient pueblos = 8 free webinars on avian archaeology



Patrick O'Driscoll

Ready for something completely different? How about a free, online series of eight monthly first-Tuesday lectures about birds and their place in the mysterious cultures and groundbreaking archaeology of the ancient Southwest?

I have no idea whether this will be A) the coolest-ever mashup of two disparate subjects (birds and archaeology), B) a birds-sherds-and-nerds snooze fest, or C) something intriguingly in between. But with topics ranging so widely — from the power

associated with ducks in “Basketmaker culture” and the domestication of wild turkeys to the presence of exotic tropical birds in Chaco Canyon and the enduring inspiration that Ancestral Puebloan potters found in birds and feathers — I am totally game to find out. And yes, it’s free.

The “Avian Archaeology” Zoom webinar series, which starts Oct. 5 and continues every month through next May, is the invention of [Archaeology Southwest](#), a Tucson-based nonprofit that seeks to protect and explore places of the region’s past. It’s the latest in the organization’s “Archaeology Café” series, for its informal forums bringing lifelong learners together with experts in the deep history of the Southwest.

Personally, I was a fan of the enigmatic Ancestral Puebloan civilizations that built places like Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon and Tuzigoot before I became a birder. But it took becoming a birder to appreciate the remarkably diverse ways that feathered wildlife were involved in the lives and cultures of the early native peoples of our desert Southwest.

A clever teaser on the Archaeology Southwest website reads like a birder wrote it: “(O)ur winged friends have always held significance in our lives. In the ancient Southwest, as elsewhere, human-avian relationships had important social, ritual, economic, and political dimensions. Come explore these complex relationships by examining bird remains, feather textiles, painted pottery, petroglyphs, and more . . . You’ll gain greater insight into how the region’s peoples interacted with a variety of different birds — from turkeys to macaws — across centuries. You won’t find that in Peterson, Kaufman, or Sibley!”

Registration for each webinar individually is on Archaeology Southwest’s website at <https://www.archaeologysouthwest.org/things-to-do/cafe/>. If you can’t join a webinar or enrollment is full, you can still watch videos of each café presentation about a week later. They’ll be posted in both the [video archive](#) on the website and on [Archaeology Southwest’s YouTube channel](#). As the website also notes: “We meet virtually through Zoom, so you won’t even have to leave your nest!”

First up on Oct. 5 is **Ancestral Pueblo Turkey Penning in Perspective** with **Cyler Conrad**, archaeologist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory and University of New Mexico. *He will explore how scientists have identified and situated turkey pens in the Ancestral Pueblo archaeological record, and what that means in understanding early human-turkey dynamics in the Southwest.*

Continued on page 19

Here's the rest of the lineup, also with clickable links to register for each:

Nov. 2: Turkeys in the Mimbres Valley

Sean Dolan (N3B Los Alamos)

With pottery images and analysis of maternal DNA and bone isotopes, he'll explore how the early residents of what today is southwestern New Mexico interacted with turkeys.

Dec. 7: Turkey Feather Blankets in Ancestral Pueblo History

Bill Lipe (emeritus, Washington State U.) and **Mary Weahkee** (New Mexico Office of Archaeological Studies)

Lipe will discuss evidence of feather blanket development in the lives of ancestral Puebloans (across more than 1,600 years of domestication). Weahkee, a well-known present-day weaver of turkey feather blankets, will discuss techniques in making them.

Jan. 4, 2022: Ducks, Power, and the San Juan Basketmakers

Polly Schaafsma (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology)

She will discuss the duck as a symbol in the rock art of Basketmaker II–III cultures.

Feb. 1, 2022: The Importance of Birds in Chaco Canyon

Katelyn Bishop (U. of Illinois)

She'll share findings/insights from analysis of birds' remains in Chaco Canyon, NM that reveal birds' broad and deep involvement in people's lives there.

March 1, 2022: Birds, Feathers, and Ancient Pueblo Pottery

Kelley Hays-Gilpin (Northern Arizona U., Museum of Northern Arizona)

She will explore bird images and their meanings in the color, painted designs and shapes of pottery from 7th century ancestral to 15th century historic to contemporary work, and with a focus on those of the Hopi Mesas.

April 5, 2022: A Rafter of Burials: Sapa'owinge Turkey Interments

Rachel Burger (Southern Methodist U.)

She will describe a room used only for disposal of turkey remains at Sapa'owinge pueblo in New Mexico's Chama Valley, and what it reveals about Tewa village social institutions and practices.

May 3, 2022: Birds of the Sun: Macaws, Parrots, and People

Christopher W. Schwartz (Arizona State U.), **Patricia A. Gilman** (U. of Oklahoma),

and **Stephen Plog** (emeritus, U. of Virginia)

They'll discuss recent detailed analyses of macaws and parrots, native much farther south of the Mexico border but found in numerous Arizona and New Mexico archaeological sites and given too little attention until now among archaeologists.

Please be aware that all eight programs are scheduled at 6 p.m. Mountain STANDARD Time in Arizona, which does not observe Daylight Saving Time. This means the programs in October and November begin in Colorado at 7 p.m. MDT (before Daylight Time ends Nov. 7). The December 2021 and January, February and March 2022 programs, all in Mountain Standard Time, have the same 6 p.m. start as in Arizona. Then, the April and May 2022 programs after Mountain Daylight Time resumes (March 13) are again at 7 p.m. MDT in Colorado, which is 6 p.m. Standard Time in Arizona.



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 11 | NOVEMBER 2021

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FROM THE FIELD

DFO has its own eBird page? Check it out!

NEW COLUMN, PAGE 16

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Your trip leader, close up

NEW FEATURE, PAGE 11

FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping:
Overnighter to
Rio Blanco + more

PAGE 13

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Coming up: DFO's busy
fall and winter

PAGE 2

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Mississippi Kite

📷 Rob Raker

📍 Clayton neighborhood,
Denver





FROM THE PRESIDENT

From birding points south, looking homeward to DFO's busy fall and coming winter

Susan Blansett

I'm writing this from my hotel room in Las Vegas, NM, where early tomorrow — Sunday, Oct. 3 — I hope to share the dawn with hundreds of birds. This morning I visited [Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge](#) about 30 minutes south of Raton. Then I continued south on I-25 to investigate a relatively new and undeveloped refuge, the [Rio Mora NWR](#) just 20 miles north of my overnight stop here. Rio Mora's landscape was stunning, but having arrived in the afternoon, I found the bird life rather quiet. It left me wanting more — but even in my wanting, how wonderful fall birding can still be!

Soon I'll return north, where I'm already thinking of what's ahead for DFO this winter — in particular, the Denver Christmas Bird Count, led for the umpteenth time by our own **Joey Kellner**. More details will come soon, but for now, mark December 18 on your calendar. Please resolve this year to help us count birds and species in any of two dozen count areas in a 15-mile-diameter circle over Denver's west and southwest suburbs. This isn't just great community science, it's great fun.

And speaking of fun, Joey is also seeking a couple of volunteers to help organize the Denver CBC evening potluck at the Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield State Park after the counting's done. Please contact Joey at vireol@comcast.net to volunteer your help at this great gathering.

On the last Monday in September, our club marked not one but three milestones: our first in-person evening program in nearly 18 months, our first live-stream program via DFO's new YouTube channel, and thus, our first-ever "hybrid" audience of in-person and remote attendees. **Scott Somershoe**, DFO member and regional land-bird coordinator for U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, graciously agreed to be our guinea pig for this first hybrid program. He did a fabulous job entertaining us with a nine-month update on his Big Green Year 2021 quest in memory of the late **Joe Roller**. A recording of the program is now up on DFO's website for viewing at <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>, and I encourage you all to watch and enjoy. Next month's program with **Nathan Pieplow** will also be a

hybrid in-person/online event. (Read more about both programs elsewhere in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*.)

Did somebody say, "Field trips"? Ever since veteran trip leader **David Suddjian** stepped up to oversee DFO's remarkable program of free outings, fresh enthusiasm grows with each new idea about expanding and broadening our field trip offerings. We remain excited despite lingering coronavirus disruption across the country because of the Delta variant of Covid-19.

As an organization, DFO has weathered the pandemic very well, due largely to the diligence of the DFO Board in response to changing circumstances, and the diligence of our members in showing appropriate caution. This vigilance continues. By the time you read this, the DFO Executive Committee will have met to consider new steps to keep field trips and in-person gatherings open and available while continuing to protect all participants in club activities.

Even in a politically charged Covid-19 environment nationally, birding can continue to unite us in the beauty of birds, its immersion in nature, and the enjoyment of each other's company. As I am reminded on this brief New Mexico getaway of mine, birding instantly transports us. Birding together with friendship, laughter and shared experiences can be a welcome respite from anxiety. As DFO's [Inclusion and Diversity Statement](#) reminds us, our shared hobby and passion are "open to the enjoyment of anyone and everyone."

I say all of this as a reminder to be aware of each other when you participate in any DFO activity. Our behavior towards others — even a careless word or declaring a strong opinion on a contentious topic — can easily and unwittingly hurt feelings or disrespect others' own carefully considered positions or decisions. It may be a cliché, but we really *are* all in this together.

Happy birding,

— Susan



Rob Raker's shot on Sept. 5, 2021 of a juvenile/fledgling Mississippi Kite in the nest represents a happy surprise. According to eBird and the *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II*, it's the first known nesting of the species inside the Denver city and county limits. Scattered first Denver reports of adult kites had emerged in early July and later in August in the Park Hill neighborhood and in early and mid-August in the Clayton neighborhood (east of York Street and north of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard). But it wasn't until a spate of early September sightings along Clayton's quiet 33rd Avenue that the nest was discovered in a tree near Clayton Street. Although dozens of birders saw kites, it remains unclear if there were one or two juveniles. The last sighting of both adults and a juvenile was Sept. 12. Kite fledglings are known to revisit the nest up to 10 days after learning to fly, and the Denver adults were seen bringing large insects to a hungry, calling fledgling at the nest. Mississippi Kites elsewhere have returned to reuse previous nests. Here's hoping Denver's first Kite couple does the same in 2022.

DFO NEWS

DFO News Notes

*Got blurbs on birds? **DFO News Notes** is where to share club news briefs, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life events, and pretty much any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. The Lark Bunting welcomes your contributions. Send questions, items and photos to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

Birders 'n' brats in the 'Belt

The DFO Members-Only Picnic returned on Sept. 18 after 2020's Covid-19 pandemic cancellation. As in 2019, the gathering was held at Prospect Park in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. With a long list of thank-you's, DFO President **Susan Blansett** welcomed about 35 members and guests to the club's first in-person gathering beyond field trips since early 2020. Atop Susan's list was longtime field trip director **Karen von Saltza**, who retired last spring and attended the picnic. Before the grilling began, DFO field trip leader **John Breitsch** led members on a pre-picnic outing around the greenbelt. Afterwards, picnic coordinator and DFO past president **Dave Hill** thanked a cadre of picnic volunteers, including planner/purchasers **Tom Behnfield** and **Will Burt**, griller-bratwurstmeisters **Mark Amershek** and **Patrick O'Driscoll**, setup crew **Kate Brannan**, **Tom** and **Mary Cay Burger**, **Bill Turner**, **Mary Keithler**, and **Maggie Brahm**, and at the cash box for contributions, DFO Treasurer **Sue Summers**. Thanks as well to late lingerers who helped with picnic cleanup. See you all next year!

DFO'er is new BBS coordinator

Add the title of Colorado coordinator for the [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#) (BBS) to **David Suddjian's** growing list of birding duties in the state. Suddjian, a prolific DFO field trip leader who recently joined the DFO Board and became the club's new Field Trip chair, succeeds longtime Colorado BBS coordinator and DFO member **Hugh Kingery**, who edited the original 1998 [Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas](#). Suddjian surveyed BBS routes in California for 29 years before moving to Colorado in 2013 and continuing his involvement. The BBS is the primary source for critical data used to evaluate the status of continental bird species. Each year thousands of citizen scientists skilled in avian identification gather data on BBS routes. In Colorado, 123 volunteer surveyors cover 140 routes during a breeding data-collection "window" between May 27 and July 10.

Continued on page 4

Save the date: the CBC is back

It's almost time again for the Denver Christmas Bird Count, the annual December canvass of species and their numbers within a 15-mile-diameter circle over a large swath of Denver's west and southwest suburbs. The count, coordinated by DFO since 2019, was canceled in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This year, the count WILL go on and is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 18. Denver CBC compiler **Joey Kellner** says volunteers will be needed to help spot and count birds in each of the 24 geographical count areas within the circle. Look for more details and how to sign up in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

And AFTER the CBC . . .

Are you good at setting up a party? The Denver CBC, scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 18, needs a post-count potluck dinner coordinator (or two, to share the fun). As in previous years, this popular gathering after the count to share data and experiences will again be held at Chatfield State Park headquarters. For more information about how you can help, contact Denver CBC compiler **Joey Kellner** at vireol@comcast.net. Thanks!

We have a winner

Chuck Metzger, a member of DFO since 2005, won the door prize given at the Sept. 27 evening meeting to celebrate DFO's return to in-person programs. Chuck's name was drawn from among all attendees at the program that featured member and "Green Big Year" bicyclist-birder **Scott Somershoe's** update on his year-long quest. Metzger took home an original painting by the Pueblo, CO artist and illustrator **Radeaux**. The artwork, donated by the family of a deceased DFO member, is of a Black-throated Sparrow. Thanks to all who attended this post-pandemic milestone.

In Memoriam

Judith Lee "Judi" Acre, 79

Born in Denver on July 14, 1942 and died on June 30, 2021. She worked for more than 33 years as a news librarian at *The Denver Post*, where she archived the newspaper's collection of more than 2 million photos. Judi volunteered for the Denver Art Museum for 23 years and counted birdwatching among hobbies that included embroidery, needlepoint and cross-stitch. Judi became a member of DFO in 2014. Contributions in lieu of flowers may be made to Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (www.birdconservancy.org).

Sue Melton Hall, 86

Born Jan. 5, 1935 and died July 29, 2021. A 25-year member of DFO, Sue lived in Centennial, CO. She moved to Colorado in the mid-1990s when she was **Sue Shulman**. Soon thereafter, in 1996, she joined DFO. A memorial service was held on Aug. 31.



DFO picnickers
Patrick O'Driscoll



Bratwurstmeister Mark Amershek
Patrick O'Driscoll



Judi Acre

Your tax break can help build DFO's nest egg

Sue Summers and Roger Koester

The end of 2021 will be here before you know it, so this is a great time to consider tax-friendly charitable giving. (Not that it's something to consider *only* for end-of-year financial decisions or even April 15 tax-time planning.) When you begin the next round of tax planning, consider these ways to contribute to Denver Field Ornithologists and save on your taxes at the same time.

First up:

Qualified Charitable Distributions

You might recall from the news last year that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, waived for 2020 the requirement that IRA holders older than 72 (or 70½ before Jan. 1, 2020) had to withdraw a required minimum amount of money from their retirement account. This year, that requirement is back — and with it, the need to pay income taxes on the taxable amount of that withdrawal.

Here's why this is important for charitable giving. People who take Required Minimum Distributions (or RMDs) can donate all or a portion of that distribution directly to a qualified nonprofit organization like DFO, and that portion of their IRA distribution will not be subject to income tax. They can do that any time during the year, as they make these required withdrawals from their retirement savings.

Such a donation is called a QCD, or Qualified Charitable Distribution. If you are now required to take a minimum distribution in 2021, consider this strategy to make some or all of it a QCD so the donation amount will be exempt from taxable income. Because this is a reduction of taxable income, you don't need to itemize your taxes to take advantage of this exemption, either.

But know this: **The funds must be donated directly from your IRA to the charity.** If funds are distributed personally to you and then donated, they don't qualify for the tax exemption.

Know this, too: There are additional restrictions that may apply to some individuals. For more about all of this and how it may apply to your specific situation, contact your tax adviser or retirement provider.

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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Time for a new logo for DFO — and you can help!

Sharon Tinianow

The DFO Board has initiated a process to create and select a graphically-up-to-date logo for our organization in light of new opportunities to promote the club and our presence in the community.

We are forming a committee to work on this with a graphic designer this fall. If you have experience in graphic design, brand identity or a related field, please consider joining the committee. For more information, contact DFO Vice President **Sharon Tinianow** by email at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

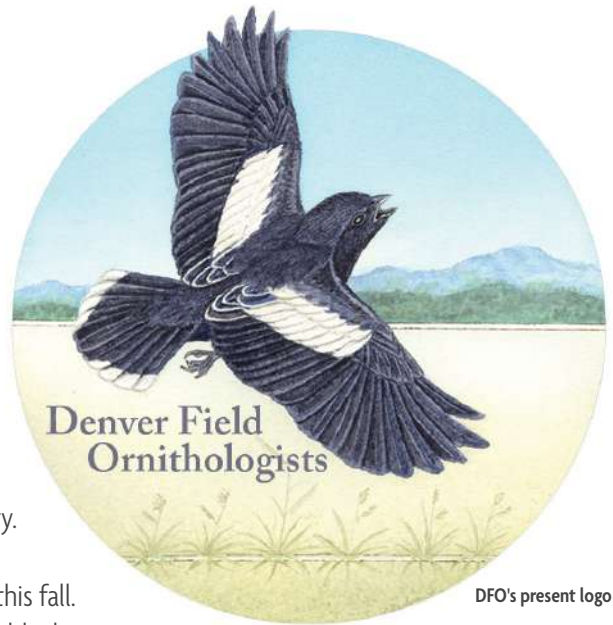
You may be aware that it was only about six years ago that DFO adopted our present logo, a round insignia that depicts Colorado's state bird, the Lark Bunting, in flight over the prairie of our eastern Plains. This familiar illustration was rendered by the Pueblo, CO-based artist **Radeaux**, known for his illustrations in the *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas*, among many others of Colorado fauna. DFO gave away a donated work of his, a painting of a Black-throated Sparrow, as a door prize for attendance at the Sept. 27 monthly program, our first in-person program since the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown in spring 2020.

Although this emblem is visually pleasing, it cannot be reproduced in high enough resolution for use in trailside signs, larger banners or other promotional club merchandise such as T-shirts, hats or tote bags. The reason has to do with the intricacies of modern graphic design, the limits of pixelated imagery and the challenge of rendering this beloved DFO illustration clearly for anything larger than a website image or a printed document or letterhead.

However, the current drawn-and-pixelated logo can and will continue to appear atop DFO's newsletter, where it mirrors the name of our signature publication, *The Lark Bunting*. A new logo for other uses would be designed using vector art technology, which allows for an image that can be enlarged to any needed size and rendered in innumerable color combinations. Most modern logos in use today were designed using vector art.

Most immediately, this would allow the DFO logo to appear on signs planned for the HawkWatch site on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. These trailside signs, part of Jefferson County Open Space improvements on the site, will build awareness of DFO's lead involvement in the group effort to monitor spring migration of birds of prey along the Front Range. Logo redesign also will allow us to produce and provide distinctive merchandise for members that features the club logo, something the DFO Board has talked about doing over the past few years. The revised logo would serve in a broad range of uses as the visual "brand" identity of Denver Field Ornithologists.

The new-logo project timeline is short. We hope to complete the work by the end of 2021. If you are looking for a way to get involved with DFO, this may be the opportunity you have been waiting for.



DFO's present logo



UPCOMING PROGRAM

The Internet of Wings: How the data revolution is about to change the way you bird

Nathan Pieplow

Monday, October 25, 7 p.m. MDT

LIVE in person at [Unity Spiritual Center Denver](#)

STREAMING LIVE on [DFO's YouTube Channel](#)

What if your phone could pick out rarities for you from a flock of birds? What if it could tell you exactly where an individual migrant came from and where it is going? These technologies already exist, or soon will — and **Nathan Pieplow**, one of Colorado's foremost birders, has plenty to say about them.

In this presentation at DFO's Oct. 25 evening program meeting, Pieplow will discuss how cutting-edge innovations in bird tracking and automatic identification can enhance conservation, supercharge citizen science, and broaden the appeal of birding.

You'll learn how the song of a White-crowned Sparrow communicates not just its species identity, but its street address. You'll learn what happened when a flock of curlews ran into a snowstorm, and how we know. And you'll learn how YOU can collect the data needed to reverse declines in bird populations.

A former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' *Colorado Birds* quarterly journal, he is the author of the two volumes of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* for both western and eastern North America. Pieplow's day job is assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. A man of multiple talents, he even dabbles in graphic design. He won the National Association of Science Writers contest last year to design its ScienceWriters2020 conference logo.

A native of South Dakota, he grew up fascinated by birds and has been an intense student of bird sounds for 18 years. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail website](#).

If you cannot attend Pieplow's presentation in person, it's easy to tune in via DFO's YouTube channel. Using your computer, tablet or smartphone, go to the channel's online link (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFqZeYj0BHP-EuNxjb4bthQ/featured>) shortly before 7 p.m. MST on Oct. 25 and click on the livestreaming link.



UPCOMING PROGRAM

From “Crazy French” to Fishers Peak: Colorado’s newest state park

Crystal Dreiling

Monday, November 22, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom

*(Please note: All DFO programs are on the **fourth** Monday of the month, which is NOT always the last Monday of the month. November 2021 has five Mondays.)*

In October 2020, Fishers Peak State Park became the newest of Colorado’s 42 state parks, and its second-largest. With rugged topography, dense, wildlife-rich forests, grasslands, foothills and mesas in the mountainous southern borderlands outside Trinidad, the park opened in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with public access to only a tiny, 250-acre patch of its 19,200 total acres.

At the time, **Crystal Dreiling**, park manager of both Fishers Peak and nearby Trinidad Lake State Park, said the goal was “to give everyone a taste of the hiking, hunting, wildlife watching and more that will be available once the park is fully developed in coming years.” For now, most of it remains closed “while scientific inventories, planning and development occur,” Dreiling added. Fishers Peak is the result of a partnership among the state, the Trust for Public Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the local Trinidad community, among others.

A Colorado native, Dreiling joined Colorado State Parks 19 years ago as a seasonal boat ranger at Cherry Creek SP, working summers throughout college and becoming a full-time park ranger in 2006. Her other park assignments before coming south to Trinidad Lake (2013) included Chatfield SP and the senior ranger post at Golden Gate Canyon SP. She became park manager for both Trinidad Lake and Fishers Peak in 2019.

Join Dreiling in DFO’s final monthly evening program of 2021 to learn more about Fishers Peak SP’s origins (locals called it Crazy French Ranch), what has been learned about it thus far, what’s ahead, and the new park’s prospects for birders (69 species in just 21 eBird reports from the park’s Moore Canyon hotspot since May 2020).

This presentation will be via Zoom. Go to this link to register: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_JvDOzzapSiqlxSEFkmjAgA. Ahead of the Nov. 22 program, date you will receive a link with instructions on how to join the program.

We welcome your program ideas!

As DFO concludes its evening program schedule for the year in November, we welcome your ideas and suggestions for future programs and presenters in 2022 and beyond. Share them with us! Contact **Bill Turner**, DFO’s Program manager, at toursbyturner@aol.com. Thanks in advance for your suggestions!

Bird-cycling in the name of Joe: Scott's Green Big Year birding adventure

Patrick O'Driscoll

On Labor Day weekend 2016, federal government ornithologist **Scott Somershoe** went on his first DFO field trip, a hopscotch through northeastern Colorado reservoirs with veteran trip leader **Joey Kellner**. Among the other participants was the longtime Colorado birder, gentle persuader and Denver Field Ornithologists maven **Joe Roller**.

"Joe swindled me into being an eBird reviewer that day. I had just met him! That was not fair!" Somershoe joked as he began the DFO evening presentation Sept. 27 about his "Green Big Year" of birding-by-bicycle in 2021. Scott mounted his ambitious mission to raise funds, species by species, for bird research grants in memory of Roller, who died unexpectedly last November, days before Thanksgiving.

"Joe was obviously somebody you get to know really fast and get to know really well . . . somebody you admired very quickly, bad jokes and all. I liked his bad jokes," Somershoe said with obvious affection for a friend gone far too soon. When Roller died, Scott was already deep into his first carbon-free big year, tallying as many bird species in 2020 as he could see or hear — but only within walking or cycling distance of his home in Littleton. No driving, no carpooling, no hitchhiking.

It had begun as a Covid-19 diversion. Somershoe had lots of home time, telecommuting from pandemic isolation in his job as land-bird coordinator for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. Work was phone calls, meetings on Zoom, and zero out-of-town trips. Having once ridden

thousands of miles a year for exercise and sport, he returned to cycling as an eco-friendly way to see birds, too.

Cheered on by Roller himself, Scott tallied 244 species by the end of 2020. But soon after Joe's death, he was already pondering: "What could we do for Joe? Could I do something with green birding?" He recalled his days as "a poor graduate student" whose research projects needed small grants like the ones DFO awards annually for bird-related research.

Thus was born the 2021 Joe Roller Memorial Green Big Year. Since New Year's Day, Somershoe has been chasing bird species on bike and collecting per-species pledges for contributions for research grants in Joe's name. Colorado Field Ornithologists provided the fundraising platform for the [Joe Roller Memorial Grant](#) (where you can pledge donations anytime). Scott also promotes it with a blog (<https://jrmemorialgreenbigyear.blogspot.com/>) and occasional update posts on CFO's CoBirds email listserv.

Somershoe's presentation had additional significance as DFO's first in-person program after more than 18 months of pandemic restrictions and precautions. Nevertheless, the audience at Unity Spiritual Center Denver totaled only 31 people, though mask provisions and ample room for distancing allowed for easy attendance. The program was also livestreamed via DFO's YouTube channel, a first as well. Despite the popularity of similar remote "attendance" via Zoom for DFO programs last fall and spring, the livestream audience totaled only about 32 people.

Scott initially set a challenging goal for species (250) and an unlikely target for fundraising (\$10,000). Now he has already obliterated both: 261 species and nearly \$30,000 in total pledges and contributions, with three months still to go. "It's really humbling," he told the audience. "I'm just speechless."

But not speechless on this night. For more than an hour, Somershoe delivered stories from the trail in breathless, rapid-fire patter: of birds missed but mostly got, of new friends made and old ones rekindled, of donuts, pizza, gallons of water and sacks of roast beef sandwiches delivered by friends. He punctuated them all with exclamations from "Insane," "Awesome," and "Super fun" to "Holy moly!" and "Are you kidding me?"

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The many random thoughts while riding:

- Is the bird still there? Is it gone? That'd stink.
- How hard will it be to find the bird?
- How much time can I commit to trying to find this bird?
- I have work to do today, oh, and I have to take the kids to swim lessons after dinner.
- What am I going to feed the kids for dinner?
- Would Joe tell me I was crazy for chasing this bird?
- No, Joe would have brought me coffee and donuts and celebrated finding the bird! Do this!
- Now I really want coffee and donuts.
- So much glass on the sidewalks and paths!
- I want to eat a pizza



He spoke of death-march rides that didn't yield birds . . . rare birds found literally on the trail (Veery, Red-headed Woodpecker) . . . a bird perched on his bike where he'd left it on the ground (Rock Wren) . . . an uncommon raptor found when he rode to the bike shop for repairs (Broad-winged Hawk) . . . pursuit of another good raptor (Burrowing Owl) that turned out to be a rarer one (Short-eared Owl) . . . a nemesis bird that took 10 trips to find (Canyon Wren) . . . the "tanager trifecta" (Scarlet, Summer and Western) . . . and yet more "bonus birds" he never expected to see.

"This is a marathon, not a sprint," Somershoe said at one point. "It's also extremely crazy because I have little kids," including twin boys turning 5 in November. "When I come home (from riding) and try to stretch on the floor, there's people climbing on me. There's a major management of work and family and trying to sleep, and everything else." He paused, then added: "I will sleep come January 1st."

On last Jan. 1, Somershoe hit the Big Year trail quickly. He snagged a rare White-winged Crossbill in 24-degree cold and "swept up a bunch of rarities" including Barrow's Goldeneye on an icy, 37-mile loop ride home. On Jan. 2, he went back out for rarities he'd missed on New Year's (Long-tailed Duck, Rusty Blackbird). But then, he said, "I got the shingles the next day."

Derailed for a few days by "the most painful, miserable thing I've ever experienced," Somershoe still did not stop for long. Within days, he tried a 2-mile walk in quest of bluebirds. "That was NOT smart," he admitted, wincing at the memory. Nine months later, "it's still not gone away. I'm still taking the pain meds."

As of late September, Scott had pedaled 2,177 miles and counting in 2021. He occasionally rides exhausting distances for true rarities (as many as 67 miles on some days), but of necessity he visits

ordinary, closer locations more regularly. Those sometimes yield phenomenal results.

Case in point: Littleton's Clement Park, barely a block from his front door. "It's a non-remarkable park, but I've got 175 species at that place now," Somershoe said to audience gasps. Another case in point: 35 trips to Chatfield State Park, 6 miles south of Scott's house and his most common destination beyond home and Clement. "I should just camp there," he quipped. "Stash some tripods around Chatfield is what I need to do."

After adding terns at Chatfield one day in early May, Scott casually checked an obscure patch of wetland in search of a Marsh Wren. Instead, he found an American Bittern, uncommon and inconspicuous: "I was like, 'Are you kidding me?'" That sighting confirmed one of his mantras for the year: "Sometimes you just have to keep going out to the same spots, and you're going to find stuff. I keep finding awesome birds."

In late August, a Caspian Tern, a species notorious for not sticking around in migration, was spotted late in the day at Chatfield. After negotiating with his wife — "You have an hour," she replied; dinner by 5:30 p.m. was still his duty — Scott raced to the park through rush hour and 95-degree heat. Somehow, he caught sight of the bird (and snapped "digi-bins" grab shots with phone and binoculars as it flew by), and hustled home in time to prepare and serve family dinner, on time.

At program's end, Somershoe offered his strategy for the rest of 2021, including "Bird, bird a lot, as much as I can . . . rest, rest, rest . . . eat like you're going to ride for 50 miles, because you might." He added that one of the year's "take-home" lessons is "keeping it fun and not worrying if I miss a bird. This is totally crazy, totally fun."



DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Up close with field trip leader John Breitsch

Editor's note: In the Scope is a series of occasional Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting at patodrisk@gmail.com

Name: John Breitsch

Home city: Denver

Age: 57

Occupation: Nuclear pharmacy technician

How and when I became a birder?

Birding wasn't something that happened overnight. I've watched birds, had feeders, and tried to identify a few as far back as the early '90s. The true buildup to being a trip-going birder started in 2003.

When and why I joined DFO?

My account says 2013, but I've been a member on and off from the mid-2000s. By the end of that trip-going birder buildup year of 2003, I was visiting places regularly and running into people who suggested various organizations to join for field trips.

My first DFO outing?

I think the first field trip I went on was in early 2004. I have no memory of it now or who led it, but it was most likely one of our local state parks, perhaps Cherry Creek SP.

Why I became a field trip leader?

DFO can always use more trip leaders, and I had been asked to do it several times. When my work schedule finally worked for it, I accepted the invite to leader training. The "why" is more about giving back to DFO. As a new birder, I learned so much about things birding-related as a trip participant — new birding locations, how to spot and ID birds, techniques for getting others on the trip "onto" the bird you've found, and so forth.

First field trip I led?

It was in April 2017 at First Creek @ DEN Open Space in Denver. *[John has birded there more than 200 times, seen 155 of the open space's 188 recorded species, and led most of the DFO field trips there since it opened in December 2016.]*

Favorite trip destination?

Any time I'm asked about my favorite *anything*, there's a side discussion with myself about whether I have none — or too many. Anyone who has birded with me probably heard me call multiple birds "one of my favorites." I always say that in the moment I'm appreciating that bird. The same applies to locations. I love being out there so much that far more than just one place have

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qualities that stand out in my mind. Since you asked, here's one: the South Platte River in winter. Even on the harshest days, its open water will have birds that are fun to study. I like anyplace near the riverside parking areas at 88th or 74th avenues up in Adams County and, in town, Denver's Overland Park and the stretch of river south of there.

Best field trip ever?

This requires two answers. The best DFO trip I ever went on was the week-long one I led to New Mexico in August 2019. *[NOTE: Read John's excellent and comprehensive report about this trip on the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/TripReports/9664.pdf>.]* So many reasons why: the great company, the food, and of course, the 160 species of birds we listed. But if you're talking location, and in Colorado, I am always a fan of Pine Valley Ranch Park in Jefferson County in the spring.

Field trip philosophy?

When planning a field trip, my obvious first objective, regardless of place, is to go at the right time — when there will be birds there to see. But in my mind, I like to have at least one other objective, one not “advertised.” For instance: Showing people a spot they aren't familiar with or less-familiar trails they may have overlooked at a popular location. I did that two years ago in a series of trips to Mount Falcon Park outside of Morrison. Each covered lesser-known trails that people may not have birded before. Other secondary objectives that may be on my mind include finding a “target” bird species, observing the breeding behavior of our summer birds, pacing our walk to meet the needs of fellow photographers, or adding a non-birding social component — planning a “sit spot” for lunch on the trail, or getting the group together somewhere for lunch afterwards.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

“A” place? That's funny. How am I supposed to narrow that down? I'd have to filter through hundreds — the Catalonia region of Spain, Panama, Australia, South America, Alaska, and all the others. So, I'll go small with my final answer. I want to go birding where I used to live when I wasn't a birder — to see what was all around me that I didn't really notice. With no regard to the possible bird list, I'm going with the Poconos, the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. I was there for eight years and chose to live there, myself.

The next trip I'm leading?

At the moment, I have none on the DFO schedule (my last was the pre-event field trip on Sept. 18 at Wheat Ridge Greenbelt before the DFO Picnic). But I'll be back. My overnight-shift work schedule and various other factors determine what I can do and when I can do it. With that weird schedule, I'm always getting ready to go to bed by the end of most of my field trips!

Welcome to new DFO members

Dawn Baudek-Smith, Castle Pines; Karen Clark, Broomfield; Betsy Goodwin, Pueblo; David Hapman, Boulder; Julie Hendricksen, Denver; Darcy Juday, Longmont; Sharon P. Kelly, Denver; Kip Miller, Colorado Springs; Holly Sollod, Denver; Lorna Thomas, Littleton, and Jerry and Joyce Williams, Aurora

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Betsy Goodwin

Friends of DFO
Susan Clasen, Darcy Juday

Field Tripping: Rio Blanco days (and a night)

*Editor's note: This introduces **Field Tripping**, a new regular feature in The Lark Bunting in which members, whether trip leaders or participants, share their experience of a recent DFO field trip of note. Want to share your tale from the DFO trail? Contact **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of The Lark Bunting, at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

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The trip: Rio Blanco / Grand, Routt and Moffat Counties, CO
Date: Tuesday-Wednesday, Aug. 16-17
Leader: David Suddjian + 7 participants

.....

David Suddjian

This intense Western Colorado field trip was DFO's first overnight excursion since 2019. I had been looking forward to a trip that would focus on remote Rio Blanco County, a sparsely populated slice of Colorado (only two towns) that reaches from Utah to the Flat Tops. Its scenic combination of wooded mountains and western plateau desert offers great contrast and birding diversity.

Whichever route you choose to get to Rio Blanco takes time, so birding there is an intentional effort. This would be only DFO's second-ever visit to the county, and we would also sample the birding in Grand, Routt and Moffat counties as we looped across the northwestern part of the state.

We began our birding on Aug. 16 in Grand, north of Kremmling, then worked west through Routt into Rio Blanco along the [Flat Tops Trail Scenic Byway](#). We continued west to Meeker, then yet farther west, following the White River (Rio Blanco in Spanish) on a long haul to Rangely, about 20 miles short of Utah. There, five of the group camped among the big cottonwoods at Rangely Camper Park along the river; the other three bunked at a hotel in town. The next day, Aug. 17, we returned east to Meeker, then north to Craig in Moffat and down through Routt back to our starting point in Grand County.

I enjoy county birding — that is, seeking as many species as possible in each of Colorado's 64 counties. eBird makes

tracking this easy and fun. For some "county birders," the goal is to reach a target number in each county. Some counties are definitely easier than others. Whatever the target, county birding demands that birders seek out varied habitats, different settings, and watch for new and unexpected species. I believe county birding is good for birding in general. One can learn patterns of which species occur where across Colorado's varied and scenic landscapes, experience new places and make discoveries.

Going into our trip, my personal Rio Blanco County count was at 93 species, so I thought I'd likely surpass my 100-species goal this time. Most of the seven others on the trip were county birders, too, but with little or no previous experience in the counties we would visit. A perfect opportunity for all! Besides just one prior visit to Rio Blanco, DFO had only visited Routt County once before as well, on a similar two-day trip in 2019. The club had only led two trips before in Moffat County. We had lots of room for discovery and new species for DFO's "life list," too.

To me, a trip of this sort does not focus on a few principal birding sites, but rather a tapestry of birding places. This includes both designated stops and impromptu birding in transit throughout the day — along the roads, getting out to explore here, sampling there. I plan specific stops at intervals, some of them pretty much stationary, others to explore and stroll along side roads, through campgrounds, around lakeshores. There are unexpected stops, too, where the habitat or a bird catches the eye. Sometimes, in fact, those improvised ones can be the best.

We sample a variety of places and habitats and encounter many species. Of course, planned stops can sometimes fizzle, even if eBird shows they were good for someone else before us. That was a concern this summer because of a real paucity of birds and species in many mountain locations. It was hard to know what to expect, and I worried about "dead zones."

But overall, the trip went very smoothly. The route was easy to follow, no one got hurt, we had zero car problems, and we managed to stay together despite our exhaustion. The birding was good, too, highlighting the joys of county birding and the dynamic nature of long overnight field trips.

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DAY 1

Our first several stops in Grand and Routt counties were a good start, but it was soon apparent that the bird shortages experienced broadly this season were true here, too. We would have to work harder to find birds and even skip some planned stops if they appeared quiet. Fortunately, there were enough stops with exciting birding to keep our trip moving.

Take Rio Blanco's Chapman Reservoir, for instance. It was our eighth stop on the long first day. As we bumped along a washboard road toward the campground, we passed through an amazing aspen forest — yet there was not a bird in sight. At the back end of the nearly empty campground (yay, bathrooms!), we saw the reservoir through the trees, enjoyed lots of wildflowers still in bloom (lots of bugs, too), and felt the beauty and peacefulness of the place.

But then . . . what was that? Less-familiar calls of birds in flight caught our ears. I began to imitate the call of a Northern Pygmy-Owl to see what else might happen. Those calling fliers, now over the reservoir, materialized into Purple Martins! And wait: an actual pygmy-owl was now calling back to me from across the lake! A Bald Eagle perched in a nearby snag. As we walked the lakeshore to see the martins better, we flushed sparrows. Canada Jays arrived to bother the eagle. A Sharp-shinned Hawk flew overhead with prey in its talons. Suddenly, it was a remarkable day.

Farther ahead along the scenic byway, we stopped at North Fork. Amidst the drier, scrubbier realm of Gambel Oak, we found fabulous habitat — and avian silence again. Coming over to inquire as we arrived, the campground host told us he had no birds except “maybe some robins and a couple of canaries.” Everything else got mixed up in migration and went the wrong way, he declared, making a circular gesture with his hand. He seemed partly right, as we found only a single robin.

But back out on the road, we made an impromptu stop when I spotted a small pond ahead. At the margin of the pond stood chokecherry bushes with fruit — and eating them were Evening Grosbeak! Gray Catbird! Western Tanager! Cedar Waxwing! Plus: Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow Warbler, and more. One mini-bonanza balanced out a birdless prior stop . . . and so it goes.

We reached Meeker by 4 p.m., and we still had some waterbird stops ahead on the long last stretch west to Rangely. But it was getting late, and we were tired. We decided to stop at Rio Blanco State Wildlife Area. It turned out to be a highlight less for its water and possible shorebirds than for all the sparrows popping up on the shoreline and surrounding shrubs and grass. Pushing on to Rangely, we arrived at 6:30 p.m. — a 12-hour birding day.

Rangely Camper Park was just what I'd hoped it would be: nearly empty, peaceful, and with great facilities within easy reach of nice river habitat. It sits in the biggest grove of large cottonwoods around, with bird-friendly wastewater ponds nearby and the town's yard-waste dump (piles of sticks that sparrows like). Dinner and decompressing in the evening are always a welcome part of an overnight trip. We shared a simple and delicious potluck in the campground. As darkness fell, a young Great Horned Owl called for food, and continued calling through the night.

DAY 2

The plan was to begin with good birding right near the campground. I was hoping for migrant land birds — and indeed, it became the best spot of the whole trip for those. Under a rising sun gone red from the smoke of distant wildfires, we added a string of new warblers, grosbeaks and sparrows, a pile of towhees and lots more. A Great Horned Owl was standing *in the river* drinking!

Knowing we had the long return trek east still ahead and the day getting hot fast, I wondered how many stops we could try in Rio Blanco, and which road should we take to reach Craig. Once there, what could we still fit in on the way out? We concluded our Rio Blanco County effort with a few more stops, closing out that county list with a Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay. Now in Moffat County with the midday heat rising, we managed two stops in Craig for a solid count of county birds along the Yampa River. Now we were following the river upstream into Routt County and toward Steamboat Springs.

With time for one last major stop, I elected to try Stagecoach Reservoir, 30 minutes south of Steamboat. But some unexpected minor stops on the way were happy

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DFO birders scoping at Vaughn Lake
David Suddjian



Great Horned Owl in river
Elaine Wagner



Campsite sunset
Susan Suddjian

additions. Continuing east on U.S. 40, we spotted a large group of Sandhill Cranes in a flooded pasture. Later, a U-turn to confirm a drive-by look at White-faced Ibis revealed Pectoral Sandpipers, too! After finally reaching Stagecoach, we added a whole series of new birds for the trip (and Routt County), including several shorebirds and exciting overall variety. Rain showers moved through and cooled us down. We were done, sort of . . . but does it ever really end?

Arriving at the same place we started the day before, Hinman Reservoir in Grand County, we gave it a shot. Among everything else, we added a Northern Harrier, the trip's last new bird at the trip's last stop.

Or was it? On the way out, we stopped to watch a Bald Eagle receiving angry attention from . . . a pair of Ospreys! Now we were done.

When the eBird dust settled, we had recorded a collective 108 species for the entire trip. The county tallies included 88 in Rio Blanco (67 new for DFO), 56 in Routt (25 new for the club), 30 in Moffat (four new), and 31 in Grand (nine new). Perhaps best of all, DFO contributed useful data from areas less frequently birded, and our group had moments of discovery and friendship, and memories that will last.

Final reminder: Field trip listings online

The list of new upcoming Denver Field Ornithologists field trips and their descriptions no longer appears in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter. They are on the DFO website on the same page where virtually every participant registers, at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>. Click over now to check out our many trips for October and November. Your best chance to secure a spot on a field trip is to visit the page on the first of each month when all new trips “go live.”



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

An eBird profile worth looking at

Editor's note: This begins From the Field with David Suddjian, an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at dsuddjian@gmail.com

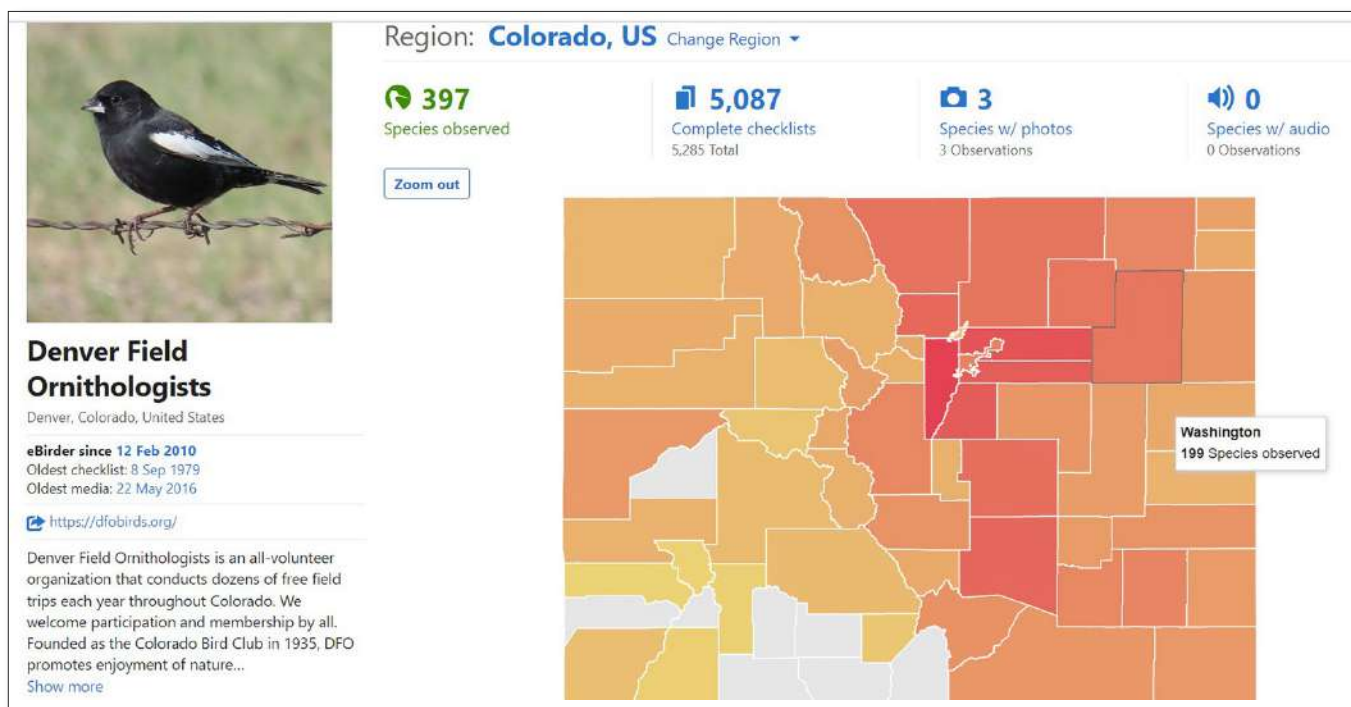
David Suddjian

One of my favorite features of eBird is each user's Profile page. It shows a colorful map of where you have birded (and you can choose which geographic region to feature: world, country, state, county). If you display Colorado, for example, it colors in the counties you have birded, with pertinent stats about numbers of species, and a sampling of your recently added checklists, photos and sound recordings. Profile pages are a great way to share and enjoy our friends' birding, and to better appreciate our own efforts.

Did you know DFO has an eBird Profile, too? There's a lot to learn from our club's page, which you can visit at <https://ebird.org/profile/MTkxMTA4/US-CO>. Looking at it last month, I saw that we were perched at 397 species recorded on DFO field trips, just three away from the coveted 400-species milestone. I also noticed the way DFO's birding focus has centered on destinations in metro Denver (of course) and generally along the Front Range.

At the same time, look how DFO has reached out with field trips to the rest of Colorado's counties in every direction — 56 of the state's 64 counties (see the table below). And if you hover with your cursor over each county, you'll see how many species our club has reported on trips there. Most counties have solid efforts, not just token species from drive-throughs. We have reached at least 100 species in 30 counties, and we have found 200 or more in 10. As you would expect, the 200-plus counties are generally along the Front Range and northeast a bit in the downstream corridor of the South Platte River. DFO has topped 300 species in just one county, Jefferson.

At the lighter end of DFO's eBird spectrum, four Colorado counties have fewer than 20 species reported on our trips so far: La Plata (19), Hinsdale (17), Ouray (16) and San Miguel (12). And eight counties, all in the state's southwest quadrant, remain blank. Can you guess where DFO may find some new



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birding destinations in 2022? The counties we have not yet birded are Delta, Dolores, San Juan, Archuleta, Mineral, Rio Grande, Conejos and Costilla — wonderful and exotic places all.

Poking around further on DFO's map, I see our club is close to some interesting county birding milestones. Gilpin, a tough mountain county in which to find 100 species, is on the verge at 99. Washington on the eastern Plains is at 199; shall we soon make it our 11th Colorado county with 200-plus? I can't quite believe it, but no DFO field trip to Washington County has ever reported a Snow Goose! Using eBird's "Target Species" feature, that's our most likely species addition there. Looks like we need to visit Washington County this winter!

Here's DFO's eBird county statistics list as of Sept. 17, 2021. Check it out:

Rank	County	Species	2021
1	Jefferson	309	142
2	Adams	273	152
3	Douglas	252	138
4	Arapahoe	250	121
5	Pueblo	233	29
6	Boulder	228	74
7	El Paso	213	31
8	Larimer	206	21
9	Weld	202	37
10	Morgan	200	53
11	Washington	199	79
12	Denver	175	82
13	Bent	171	55
14	Logan	167	18
15	Park	164	48
16	Otero	162	52
17	Huerfano	145	0
18	Fremont	141	0
19	Kiowa	140	0
20	Jackson	138	1

Rank	County	Species	2021
21	Yuma	138	46
22	Elbert	136	5
23	Las Animas	134	0
24	Baca	130	0
25	Mesa	128	0
26	Crowley	125	73
27	Prowers	125	0
28	Lincoln	121	7
29	Summit	117	0
30	Sedgwick	110	20
31	Gilpin	99	37
32	Kit Carson	97	32
33	Lake	97	63
34	Custer	96	0
35	Phillips	96	48
36	Routt	94	56
37	Rio Blanco	90	88
38	Grand	83	31
39	Teller	83	59
40	Chaffee	82	0
41	Clear Creek	81	65
42	Cheyenne	79	0
43	Garfield	79	0
44	Montrose	78	0
45	Moffat	70	30
46	Saguache	62	0
47	Gunnison	59	0
48	Broomfield	57	0
49	Eagle	57	0
50	Montezuma	53	0
51	Pitkin	39	39
52	Alamosa	36	0
53	La Plata	19	0
54	Hinsdale	17	0
55	Ouray	16	0
56	San Miguel	12	0



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:

Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 57 | ISSUE 12 | DECEMBER 2021

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Dark-eyed Junco

📷 Rob Raker

📍 White Ranch Park
Jefferson Co.





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Unexpected Lessons, Unexpected Rewards

Susan Blansett

I was awakened on Halloween morning by Honey, my smallish lab mix, who was (as she is every morning at 5:30) anticipating her breakfast. I was anticipating a very busy day, Sunday notwithstanding. As my morning coffee brewed, I filled my backyard feeders, certain of the onslaught of hungry birds and, though it was still dark, I felt a familiar pull – dawn birding! How long it had been since I had enjoyed that particular pleasure! So, I threw on my bins, grabbed my coffee and headed for Red Rocks Park, excited to explore a trail that I had never tried before.

In spite of the morning chill and low clouds, early daylight gave the colors of fall a subtle beauty that was unexpected. Alone on the trail, I reveled in the shrouded view of dramatic yet familiar rock formations, fragrant junipers, golden-leaved deciduous trees, tall grasses, and feathery fruit heads of Apache Plume. Shortly I was welcomed by the toot of a Townsend's Solitaire, then another, and for the next 90 minutes lost myself in the sights and sounds of the landscape and the birds around me: several crows, a scrub jay, a raven, and more solitaires. Then, from the corner of my eye I spotted a Northern Shrike, perched on a bush just close enough for a long, satisfying look. WOW - what a knockout! Within a few minutes, an adult Red-tailed Hawk flushed from a nearby tree. Gratitude welled up in me for the morning's bounty, along with the realization that I might have easily missed it all, had I not put myself on that trail at that time.

November is our nation's designated month of gratitude for the unexpected offerings from indigenous people to strange newcomers, for the service and sacrifices of untold veterans, and for personal gifts large and small. So I hope you'll indulge my calling out some of the many things that we who are part of DFO have to be grateful for.

First there is the joy of birding with friends throughout the year, which would not be possible without great volunteer trip

leaders and teachers who volunteer their time. Then there are all the rest of the people who volunteer for DFO committees, the members' picnic, the newsletter, and service on the DFO board of directors. Let's not forget the fascinating speakers who enlighten us almost monthly, made possible by a crew of DFO volunteers working behind the scenes. Finally, ALL of you members who support DFO and do your part to conserve bird habitats, whether in your own back yard or in countless other places.

This year I would like to thank you all for being part of our two-month grand experiment – our hybrid in-person/live-streamed programs via YouTube. We put ourselves out there with the experimental format, and the attendance – both in-person and via YouTube livestream – was, well, unexpected, which brings lessons of its own. We will return to monthly program via Zoom webinar for the next few speakers and welcome your feedback! Please let us hear from you about your preferences, won't you? There is a contact form at the bottom of the DFO website (<https://dfobirds.org/>).

I would also like to express gratitude for two recent, very generous donations to DFO – one from board member and Co-Chair of our Finance Committee, Roger Koester, and a \$2,500 gift to DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund from an *anonymous* donor. Both gifts were unexpected and are very much appreciated for the good work they will fund! This is a great time of year to make your donation to DFO. Give the article about year-end giving in this issue a read for details.

If you're NOT yet a DFO member, what are you waiting for? Please join today (and if you ARE a member, don't forget to renew!) I can guarantee unexpected pleasures will be yours when you put yourself on the DFO member path.

I'll see you in the field,
Susan

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? **DFO News Notes** is where to share club news briefs, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life events, and pretty much any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. The Lark Bunting **welcomes your contributions**. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

NEW TRIP LEADERS TAKE THE FIELD

After a pandemic year of not adding to the ranks of Denver Field Ornithologists field trip leaders, we are pleased to announce that four newly certified ones led their first outings in September and October. DFO's 2021 class of new leaders includes **Peter Ruprecht**, **Donna Stumpp**, **Karen Strong**, and **Susan Blansett**. After a training session in August, each then became certified by co-leading a trip with an already certified leader. Peter began his service on Sept. 17, co-leading an outing on the White Rocks Trail in Boulder with veteran trip leader **Chuck Hundertmark**. Donna co-led her first trip on Oct. 5 at Chatfield SP with DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian**. Karen co-led her first outing on Oct. 8 along the South Platte River at East 64th Avenue in Denver with another veteran leader, **Diane Roberts**. And Susan, who is also DFO's president, co-led her first trip on Oct. 17 in Jefferson County's Waterton Canyon with **Sue Summers**, a trip leader and DFO treasurer. Congratulations and thank you, Peter, Donna, Karen, and Susan, for joining the volunteer corps who make possible our club's most popular activity.

FLYING THE FLAG FOR DFO

Longtime DFO members and field trip leaders **Ira** and **Tammy Sanders** (marking 30 years of membership in 2021!) also are volunteers at Barr Lake State Park. They lead bird walks there in their volunteer uniform caps and vests. Each September, on the Saturday after Labor Day, the park holds its Barr Lake Bird Festival, and DFO has for many years had an information table at the event. Here, the Sanderses pause between bird walks to fly the DFO banner at one of the festival booths. Thanks for doing double duty for DFO and the park, Ira and Tammy!



Ira and Tammy Sanders on double duty at Barr Lake
Sue Summers

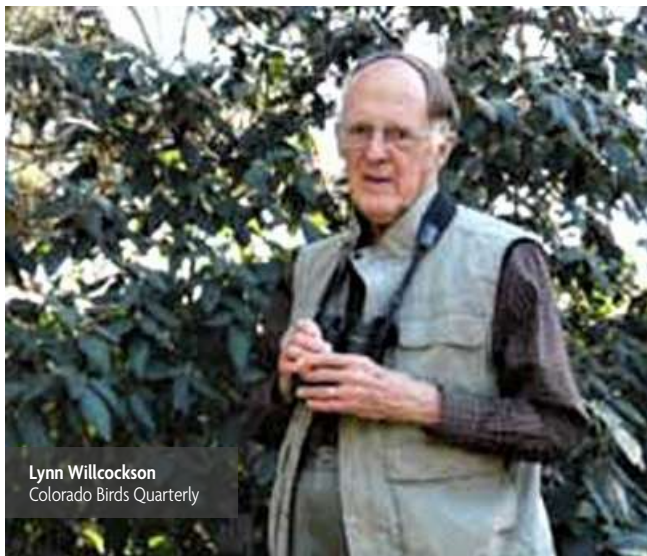
60 AND 50: TWO DFO MEMBERS' MILESTONES

As 2021 ends, DFO marks a big transition in the birding life and contributions of one of its longest-running members, **Lynn Willcockson** of Denver. According to DFO membership records, Willcockson has been a member since 1961 — 60 years! Then a young insurance agent, Lynn joined the predecessor of DFO, the Colorado Bird Club, after transferring in 1960 from his home state of Iowa to a new Denver office. Already a birder in his own right and member of the Iowa Ornithological Union, within three years he had become president (1963-66) during the period that the Colorado Bird Club transitioned into the locally oriented field-trip club DFO while also calving off the new statewide organization, Colorado Field Ornithologists. Willcockson contributed to the startup of both and in numerous roles — DFO field trip leader since the 1960s (and field trip coordinator for several years), officer (DFO treasurer and VP as well as CFO president), board trustee for both, and even the first editor in 1965 of this newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, upgrading it from previous monthly field trip reports. Willcockson also formalized the Colorado Rare Bird Alert in 1979, converting it from its “telephone tree” beginnings. No wonder both DFO and CFO gave him their highest awards: DFO's Ptarmigan Award in 1997, and CFO's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

Continued on page 4

Congratulations and thanks for 60 years of membership and service, Lynn!

And one more individual shout-out for a major anniversary this year goes to **Carol Hack** of Denver: 50 years! Carol joined DFO in 1971, and each summer, she and **Kathy Hawkins** led a club field trip to her family's Hack Ranch in Park County, near the South Park town of Jefferson, CO. Hack, who still owns the ranch, says the highlight of many fond memories on DFO trips there was showing trip participants a nest of Three-toed Woodpeckers.



Lynn Willcockson
Colorado Birds Quarterly

AND SPEAKING OF MEMBERSHIP MILESTONES . . .

DFO's more than 550 members include dozens who have ticked off notable anniversaries in 2021, too. Here are a few who hit major markers this year.

40 YEARS (1981)

Judy and **Tim Schowalter** of Granby, CO, and **Joan** and **Jack Whiting** of Denver

30 YEARS (1991)

Karen Bickett and **Sandy Selzer** of Denver, and **Tammy** and **Ira Sanders** of Golden

25 YEARS (1996)

Renee and **Dan Brachear** of Littleton; **Tamie Bulow** of Harlingen, TX; **Ann Sprague** and **Jo-Ann Garavaglia** of Arvada; **Sue Hall** of Centennial, and **Paula Hansley** of Louisville, CO

20 YEARS (2001)

Susan Barnhart of Greeley; **Jill Boice** of Denver; **Alison Kondler** of the Denver area; **Walter Messier** of Longmont, and **Richard O'Leary** of Lakewood

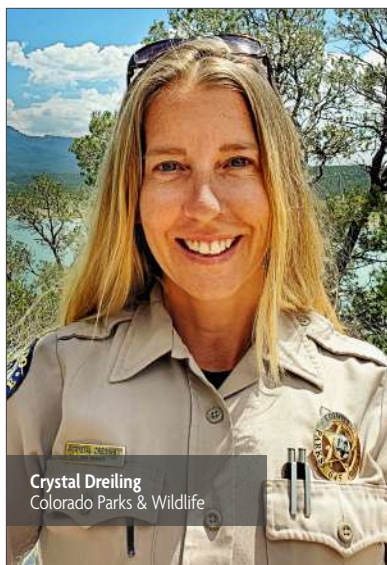
10 YEARS (2011)

John Scott Alden of Highlands Ranch; **Janice Arey** of Denver; **Jonelle Balais** of Littleton; **Paul Welschinger** and **Kate Brannan** of Wheat Ridge; **Laurie Chotena** of Littleton; **Jean** and **Charlie Curlee** of Denver; **Jayne** and **George James** of Denver; **Pepe Mendez** of Denver; **Lynne Miller** of Colorado Springs; **Susan Raymond** of Boulder; **Lori Sharp** of Littleton; **Frank** and **Barbara Shissler** of Castle Pines; **Laurel Starr** of Golden; **Bobbi Vollmer** of Denver, and **Ellen Zachary** of Englewood

Thanks one and all for your contributions to Denver Field Ornithologists. Good anniversary birding!



Lazuli Bunting
Jonelle Balais



UPCOMING PROGRAM

From “Crazy French” to Fishers Peak: Colorado’s newest state park

Crystal Dreiling
Monday, November 22
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

*(Please note: All DFO programs are on the **fourth** Monday of the month, which is NOT always the last Monday of the month. November 2021 has five Mondays.)*

As we enter the season of long nights and winter weather, DFO returns to the Zoom platform for our November evening program, the final monthly program of 2021. Our guest presenter, coming to us remotely from southern Colorado, will be **Crystal Dreiling**, park manager for Colorado’s new Fishers Peak State Park.

In October 2020, Fishers Peak became the newest (and second-largest) of Colorado’s 42 state parks (now 43 with the addition this October of Sweetwater Lake in Garfield County). With rugged topography, dense, wildlife-rich forests, grasslands, foothills and mesas in the mountainous southern borderlands outside Trinidad, Fishers Peak opened in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with public access to only a tiny, 250-acre patch of its 19,200 total acres.

At the time, Dreiling, park manager of both Fishers Peak and nearby Trinidad Lake State Park, said the goal was “to give everyone a taste of the hiking, hunting, wildlife watching and more that will be available once the park is fully developed in coming years.” For now, most of it remains closed “while scientific inventories, planning and development occur,” Dreiling says. Fishers Peak is the result of a partnership of the state, the Trust for Public Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the local Trinidad community, among others.

A Colorado native, Dreiling joined Colorado State Parks 19 years ago as a seasonal boat ranger at Cherry Creek State Park, working summers throughout college and becoming a full-time park ranger in 2006. Her other park assignments before coming south to Trinidad Lake (2013) included Chatfield Stat Park and the senior ranger post at Golden Gate Canyon State Park. She became park manager for both Trinidad Lake and Fishers Peak in 2019.

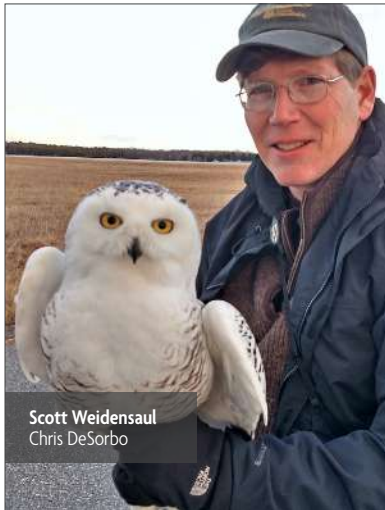
Join us the Monday before Thanksgiving to learn more about the park’s origins (locals called it Crazy French Ranch), what has been learned about it thus far, what’s ahead, and the prospects for birders (70 species in just 23 eBird reports from the park’s Moore Canyon hotspot since May 2020).

This presentation will be via Zoom. Register in advance using this link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_JvDOzzapSiqlxSEFkmjAgA. Ahead of the Nov. 22 program date, you will receive an email with a link and instructions on how to join the program. Need help with Zoom? Find basic instructions on how to get started on the [Zoom website](#).

We welcome your program ideas!

As DFO concludes its evening program schedule for the year in November, we welcome your ideas and suggestions for future programs and presenters in 2022 and beyond. Share them with us! Contact **Bill Turner**, DFO’s Program manager, at toursbyturner@aol.com. Thanks in advance for your suggestions!

... and a first peek at programs for 2022!



Scott Weidensaul
Chris DeSorbo



Luke Paterson
The West Australian

Bill Turner

After DFO's traditional December break from regular monthly program meetings, we're preparing to return in winter and spring of 2022 with a new slate of evening presentations with guest speakers from a Pulitzer Prize finalist author-birder to a veteran birding guide in Australia.

Details for February's program are still in the works, but mark your calendars now for three completely different presentations in January, March and April.

First up, on Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, is Australian bird guide **Luke "Hawk Eyes" Paterson** with "Birding Adventures in Australia's Northern Territory," a virtual tour of the best birding sites in the territory's Top End region. Peterson, a 21-year veteran of guiding birding and photography tours in the Northern Territory, will explore the Top End's biodiverse range of tropical habitats. The territory is home to more than 400 bird species, including Gouldian Finch, Red Goshawk, Rainbow Pitta, White-throated Grasswren, and the Great Bowerbird, whose unique, altar-like courtship structure Paterson visits in this [brief YouTube clip](#).

A former assistant warden at BirdLife Australia's [Broome Bird Observatory](#), Paterson is a winner of the prestigious Brolga Award given in recognition of his excellence as a tour operator. He will join us from Darwin, capital of Northern Territory, via Zoom for the Jan. 25 program. PLEASE NOTE: This program is on the 3rd Monday of January, a departure from the usual 4th Monday schedule. Register for the webinar at this link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ja28H2XEst6V0_J8-FMw2g.

The program in March will be a particularly timely appetizer for the coming spring migration. Joining DFO for a Zoom program co-sponsored with the University of Colorado's Museum of Natural History will be writer-naturalist, bird migration researcher, lecturer and guide **Scott Weidensaul**. The author of *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds* will discuss his acclaimed 2021 bestseller on Monday, March 25, 2022.

A World on the Wing introduces readers to scientists, researchers and bird lovers seeking to preserve global bird migration patterns facing disruption by climate change and other environmental challenges. Kirkus Reviews raved that *A World on the Wing* "belongs in every birder's library."

Another of Weidensaul's more than two dozen previous books, *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2000.

Weidensaul, a Pennsylvania native now living in the northern Appalachians of New Hampshire, is a fellow of the American Ornithological Society and an active field researcher. Look for more details about Weidensaul's program in the new year.

We also know now that DFO's April program meeting will feature presentations by recipients of [DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grant Fund](#). Look for more details in future issues of *The Lark Bunting*.

DFO and the 67th Denver Christmas Bird Count on December 18

Joey Kellner

Everyone is encouraged to participate in the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored by the National Audubon Society on Saturday, Dec. 18. There is no fee to participate, so no excuses. Come have a great time and help count birds. Whether you are a beginner, a novice, or an expert, all are welcome.

Consider playing a leadership role this year! Four additional volunteer leaders are needed. If you are interested and would like more information on what each role entails, please contact count leader Joey Kellner (303-978-1748), SWDenverBirding@gmail.com.

- Feeder coordinator – compile bird feeder reports within the count circle
- Potluck organizer – serve as point of contact for the compilation/potluck meeting
- Ken Caryl Ranch area leader
- Garrison Gate area leader

Here is how the count works:

The 15-mile diameter “count circle” is subdivided into 24 “count areas,” each with an area leader and a DFO field trip leader. As in 2019, all the count areas have been set up as separate DFO field trips. To participate, sign-up online at the DFO website just as you would for any DFO field trip. Alternatively, you can contact the area leader directly.

AREA NUMBER & LOCATION	AREA LEADER	CONTACT INFO	DFO LEADER
1. Red Rocks Park	Dan Stringer	720-854-5911	Mary Cay Burger
2. Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573	David Suddjian
2A. Bear Creek Lake Park	Mary Geder	303-981-8823	Mary Geder
3. Bow Mar/Marston	Mark Amershek	720-243-1521	Mark Amershek
4A. Lower South Platte (East)	Ed Holub	303-979-2194	Jill Boice
4B. Lower South Platte (West)	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671	David Suddjian
5. Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833	Doris Cruze
6. Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596	Gregg Goodrich
7A. Middle South Platte (West)	Sue Summers	253-678-3721	Sue Summers
7B. Middle South Platte (East)	Frank Coons	970-640-9902	Bea Weaver
8. Chatfield State Park	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748	Joey Kellner
9. Upper South Platte *	Jill Holden	720-288-4018	Mary Keithler
10. Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Michael Lester	201-306-8221	Diane Roberts
11. Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169	Paul Slingsby
12. Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534	Cynthia Madsen
13. Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759	Karen Strong
14. North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321	Susan Blansett
15. Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217	Gregg Goodrich
16. Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	843-319-5086	Laura Steadman
17. Ken Caryl Ranch	Leader Needed	xxx-xxx-xxxx	David Suddjian
18. Garrison Gate	Leader Needed	xxx-xxx-xxxx	Patrick O'Driscoll
19. Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508	Chris Gilbert
20. Willow Creek	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com	David Suddjian
21. Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645	Patrick O'Driscoll

* To participate in this area, you must contact the area leader no later than Monday, Nov. 22.

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Birders at Belmar
Jim Esten

The compilation (and potluck) meeting will happen at 5:00 pm at the Chatfield State Park Headquarters (south side of the lake near the Heronry Overlook). A State Parks vehicle entry pass is required to get there, so plan to carpool, if possible. After a day in the field, all participants are invited to attend the compilation meeting/potluck to feast, warm up, chat with other birders, and find out how the count fared. It is a lot of fun. Feel free to bring a dish or desert to share!

It's Membership Season at DFO — Join or renew today!

Each year in the fall, we reach out to you to renew your membership in DFO. If you have enjoyed DFO's field trips, programs, and newsletter, but have not yet joined, this is the best time to become a member. If you join or renew now, your membership will begin immediately and extend all the way through 2022. This is also a great time to consider gift memberships for the people on your holiday gift list who enjoy birding.

Whether you want to renew, join, or purchase a gift membership, the DFO website, <https://dfobirds.org/>, makes it easy. Go to the [Membership page](#) and you will be prompted to log in (or create an account if you don't already have one). The benefits of membership are outlined there, and you can make your selections. You can opt to pay electronically through PayPal (you can use a credit card without setting up a PayPal account) or send in a check.

Thanks in advance for supporting DFO field trips, programs, and more with your membership dollars!

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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FIELD TRIPS

Field Tripping: A day-long, 4-county jaunt through SE Colorado

*Editor's note: In **Field Tripping**, DFO members, both trip leaders and participants, share accounts of recent field trips of note. Want to share your tale from the DFO trail? Contact **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of The Lark Bunting, at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

The trip: Southeast Colorado

Date: Tuesday, Aug. 31

Leader: David Suddjian + 9 participants

Patricia Cullen

When I decided to go birding in southeast Colorado, I browsed DFO's offerings first and signed on early for the Aug. 31 trip with **David Suddjian**. I convinced my friend **Darcy** to go, too, and we had a truly spectacular day of birding. We birded 12 different locations in four counties (Otero, Bent, Crowley and Elbert) and saw about 80 species, including three life birds for me!

Before a trip like this, I try to use a bird mantra to fall asleep early so I can better enjoy the rigors of a long birding day ahead. Lucky for me, my mantra worked this time, and I had sandpipers dancing in my head by 9 p.m. Rising very early, we got to the Castle Rock meet-up point to join the group, and were off on the day's first leg by 5 a.m.

We headed south on I-25, then east from Pueblo on U.S. 50 to Rocky Ford in Otero County. It was the first stop en route to several destinations in Bent County along the Arkansas River and its many reservoirs.

Thirty miles farther east was our second stop, the small Bent County town of Las Animas, where we hoped to see Mississippi Kites. And we did, with a very good view of a juvenile in a tree and an adult flying nearby. Having seen kites in a nest elsewhere earlier in the week, watching how they fly reinforced my ability to ID them overhead. We had a pleasant conversation with a curious neighbor and pointed out the

birds to her. She told us about seeing some "white owls" — probably barn owls — in her own yard.

When it comes to viewing shorebirds, I am used to looking across [Lagerman Reservoir](#) in Boulder County in summer, when the west half of the reservoir is closed to protect nesting birds. It is challenging to catch sight of the peeps hiding in the grass on the far shore. So it was a pleasant surprise when we arrived at stops like John Martin Reservoir in Bent County, where small, cliff-top viewpoints gave us far better views of several species of shorebirds. All of them were easily visible, though it was harder to ID them with so many species so close together! It took me a while to get my scope on some of the birds, but others in our group were generous about sharing scopes so I got glimpses of each shorebird.

Although shorebirds were the trip's focus, I learned many small lessons on other birds, too. For instance, how to tell a Downy Woodpecker from a Hairy Woodpecker not just by bill size but also by the bird's tail feather markings. David pointed out distinguishing dark bars on the white tail feathers of a Downy, something I'd not looked for before. The Downy that visits my backyard has not shown its tail feathers enough for me to see those field marks, but now I know where to look!

Another important lesson from David will help my winter raptor-counting skills. He shared detailed information about the wing shape of Cooper's Hawk vs. Northern Harrier, their flight patterns, and how they flap their wings. And for me, our group's intense discussions about the leg colors of different gulls and the tertial wing markings of dowitchers were engaging learning experiences.

At [Holbrook Reservoir](#) in Otero County, highlights included nine Long-billed Curlews, a life bird for me. Although they were far on the east side of the reservoir from our southwest viewpoint at the boat launch, their distinctive curved bills were visible in my scope. In addition, we saw pintails, grebes, and about 300 American White Pelicans. After we moved to the east side, we watched from atop the dam as the pelicans filled the outlet channel, eating every fish that swam in! As the day's heat intensified, Darcy offered **Anne Craig** and me some welcome shade under her colorful umbrella.

I found this trip especially joyful as participants happily shared their scopes and knowledge. It was also inspirational to meet

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some of Colorado's top female birders. Observing the birding methods of more experienced birders on our trip was nearly as instructional as watching the birds themselves.

On the long driving stretches from point to point during our 10-hour birding journey, there were such varied stories to hear, tell and discuss — midlife crisis 4-wheelers, horse training tales, and Texas accents! We shared tasty oatmeal cookies and brownies to keep up our energy.

The birding was extraordinary, and the camaraderie was second to none — and I will sign up again for another day-long, long-distance DFO field trip.





DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Up close with field trip leader Jared Del Rosso

Editor's note: **In the Scope** is a series of occasional Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting at patodrisk@gmail.com

Name: Jared Del Rosso

Home city: Centennial

Age: 40

Occupation: Sociology professor

How and when I became a birder?

Driving from New Hampshire to Minnesota in 2008, I caught a public radio broadcast about Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. It focused on what his records of spring arrivals in Wisconsin might tell us now about the effect of climate change on bird migration. His migration stories planted a seed, but I didn't start birding until April 2012. I'd just finished my dissertation at the University of New Hampshire and would start a job at the University of Denver that fall. Looking for diversion until the move west, my wife and I went birding with **Deena Peschke**, another campus employee who was a birder. I hope never to forget my first encounters with a Green Heron. I couldn't believe a bird like that existed — those colors, and that quiet, hidden life — and that I'd spent my life in the Northeast without seeing or knowing one before.

When and why I joined DFO?

It must have been **Joe Roller**. I met him in 2015. He wanted help re-finding a flock of Red Crossbills I'd seen the day before at Denver's Cheesman Park. I think Joe was president of DFO at the time. He always traveled with DFO business cards and would give them out to every birder he met, and to any passersby who asked what he was looking at.

First DFO trip I went on?

About two months after arriving in Denver, I went on a November 2012 field trip in Denver City Park, led by **Chuck Hundertmark**. We scoped Ferril Lake and pursued a Brown Creeper around conifers. I remember Chuck having us look for nests, too, to see how birds used this urban habitat.

How/why I became a field trip leader?

Again, it must have been Joe Roller. He joined me a few times for birding along the High Line Canal Trail in west Arapahoe County. More than once, he encouraged me to consider leading trips. I doubt I would have without his encouragement.

First field trip I led?

On May 23, 2018, I led a small group of birders through deKoevend Park in Arapahoe County. I think it was the year when many Red Crossbills descended on the south metro area. We got lousy looks at a flock atop the cottonwood canopy, but a recording of their calls helped with the ID.

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Favorite trip destination and why?

I'm smitten with urban and suburban parks, trails, and open spaces around western Arapahoe County. An outing's list might be short — 30-40 birds is a real accomplishment where I bird around Centennial. A dozen or so species is more typical. But these places are close enough to home for frequent birding, and small enough to bird thoroughly.

Best field trip ever?

In November 2014, I joined one of **Joey Kellner's** daylong trips to mountain reservoirs. The mountains and their birdlife were still new to me. Everyone on the trip was so generous, sharing tips, stories, and views through their scopes. They made sure I got good looks at lifer-birds along the way, particularly the single Cassin's Finch we encountered.

Field trip philosophy?

I was drawn to birding for the joy of discovering something new. I've stuck with birding because even when new species are harder to get — when lifers no longer come in bunches — there are ways to watch that help us still see surprising things in them. I also like places where we might never think to look for birds, surprising patches and micro-habitats at busy parks and trails.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

Though I'm from the Northeast and have lived in Minnesota, I've never experienced spring migration east of the Mississippi River. If you're in the right place at the right time in May, you can find yourself amidst impressive flocks of warblers, vireos, tanagers, flycatchers, and other migrants. I want to experience that some May in the near future.

The next trip I'm leading?

On Nov. 23, we'll bird the South Metro Area, which includes rich birding areas along the High Line Canal, Big and Little Dry Creeks, the South Platte River, and the area's many under-birded open spaces and parks. I hope this will be the first in a series focused on expanding lists and community science in hotspots with fewer than 100 checklists or species now on eBird.

Bonus ask-yourself-Q: What's on your list of things you've mistaken for a bird?

I have a few! I was sure that the grainy crevice in a broken branch on a Cheesman Park tree was my Denver County lister for Eastern Screech-Owl. I once photographed, over and over again, a pile of rocks in the St. Louis River in Minnesota, certain it was a Bald Eagle standing in the river itself. But what broke my heart was hearing my lifer Northern Pygmy-Owl, hooting away from somewhere beyond my yard. Once the experts listened to my recording, it became something inorganic that happened to make a hooting sound.

Welcome to new DFO members

Arlene Alldredge, Lone Tree; Yvonne and Donald Davidoff, Littleton; Melanie Helton, Colorado Springs; Cliff Hendrick, Fort Collins; Matt Hogan, Lakewood; Ben Lloyd Kemena, Denver; Maureen Liegl, Denver; Doug Birdwell and Stacy McVicker, Littleton; Courtney Rella, Lafayette.

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Anonymous donor*, Tom and Mary Cay Burger, Kathy Holland, and Bob and Nancy Stocker

* Special thanks to the anonymous donor for a \$2,500 gift. We would love to acknowledge your generosity! Please contact DFO Treasurer Sue Summers at summerssue@hotmail.com.

Friends of DFO

Doug Bridwell and Stacy McVicker

12 Tips for '21:

Green energy? More, please — but at what cost to birds?

Editor's note: This is the last in The Lark Bunting's year-long 12 Tips for '21 series by members of DFO's Conservation Committee. The series focus: bird-related conservation action we can incorporate into our daily lives. (To review or read the previous articles, go to the newsletter archive on the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/News/LBArchives.aspx> for all the 2021 issues.) Look here again in 2022 for new conservation topics from the committee.

Roger Koester

Whenever I read or hear another news story about increases in the electricity produced through “green energy,” I breathe a sigh of relief and give thanks for another small step toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions from conventional power plants. But then I heave another sigh — of concern — about the unintended consequences of our effort to add more solar and wind power to the nation's energy supply.

Let's face it: There is collateral damage (or “externalities,” the bloodless term that economists use) in our pursuit of green energy. The main victims are the things with feathers, the birds that delight and unite us as birders and members of DFO.

The National Audubon Society and other sources estimate that well over 1 million birds die each year in collisions and other encounters with solar panels and wind turbines. Electric transmission lines, from plants to substations and from there throughout cities and neighborhoods, account for millions more.

But proponents of green energy argue that pollution from fossil-fuel generating plants still kills many times more — 14.5 million bird deaths a year from pollution. They also say bird deaths from solar and wind power generators pale in comparison with the number killed by collisions with buildings, and certainly the number lost to predation by outdoor cats.

Such huge differences may be true, but the question remains: As we produce more green energy in our quest to cut greenhouse gas emissions that fuel climate change, are there actions we can or should take to mitigate harmful effects on birds?

We'll discuss that shortly, but first, an aside and a big reality check. Our focus here is on utility-sized solar and wind

installations, not the smaller home rooftop solar or backyard windmill-type generators that some consumers undertake on their own. Such efforts contribute to independence from fossil fuel plants but are not known to have harmful effects on birds.

And here's that very large reality check: Utilities that produce green energy are not altruistic. They are for-profit companies. They do not give away their green electricity for free, nor do they sell it at greatly reduced rates. Their goal in delivering cleaner energy is to maximize the return on their investment. Thus, they are unlikely to be enthusiastic about what may cost them more — for instance, site studies necessary to find more bird-friendly locations for solar or wind farms, or additional measures vital to reducing bird deaths.

National Audubon, the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and other advocates report that lobbyists for the solar and wind energy industries have worked effectively to block new regulation and even enforcement of existing laws that protect birds and other wildlife. Although the US Fish and Wildlife Service has issued voluntary guidelines for wind farm site selection, they are only that — voluntary, and unenforceable. Local or regional guidelines are few. Hawaii and Saskatchewan, CA have excellent regulations that guide appropriate placement of wind and solar farms; other states and provinces have few to none.

As of February 2021, the US Energy Information Administration reported that 60 percent of electricity consumed in the US came from fossil fuel plants; only 11 percent came from wind, solar and geothermal power. (Nuclear and hydroelectric made up the rest.) If we were to replace that 60 percent, the threat to birds still could mean, potentially, 7 million deaths a year. Of even greater concern is whether new green-energy facilities would be built in flyways used by rare or endangered species.

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Against this rather dire backdrop, some positive initiatives are underway. Audubon, ABC, and a number of universities and other conservation groups in Europe are funding numerous research projects to address reducing bird deaths caused by green energy production. But progress and change appear frustratingly slow.

Besides supporting national and international efforts to protect birds with membership and contributions, individuals can act locally, as well. For instance, the Colorado State Land Board recently approved a planning lease for a 4,000-acre solar farm southeast of Pueblo. How large is that? Imagine the 1,500-acre surface of metro Denver's Chatfield Reservoir covered entirely with solar panels — and then nearly triple that size. Should the utility go forward with a profitable plan, the State Land Board — whose stated purpose is to maximize income from state lands for public education — would likely approve a production lease without hesitation.

Coloradans can let the board know that this initiative to produce more green energy is welcome, but also that large installations like it carry environmental concern for wildlife, especially birds. As you will read below, careful site selection for solar arrays and wind farms and careful avoidance of conflicts with flyways and birds' perceptions and behavior near installations can be critical in reducing collisions and avian deaths.

Below is an overview of what mitigation efforts have been, can be or are being undertaken for birds in geothermal, solar, and wind energy installations. In the US, geothermal's effect on birds is negligible compared with solar (more than 150,000 deaths) and wind (more than 1 million).

Geothermal energy

In "Geothermal and Birds," a short position paper on its website, National Audubon strongly supports energy generation with this natural underground heat resource within Earth's crust. Geothermal plants have a much smaller footprint on the landscape than big solar and wind farms. Audubon notes that geothermal resources generally are in hotter, less habitable locations, making production plants far less likely to disrupt habitat or large bird populations.

Solar electric power

Sun power comes in two flavors: Solar panel arrays and concentrated solar. In the first, utility-sized solar farms spread panels across thousands of acres.

The solar farm danger for birds is that the glass-covered panels can reflect the blue of the sky in a so-called "lake effect" or "sky effect." In the right light, flocks may mistake a solar array below for a body of water and crash into the panels trying to land. Other birds may see reflected sky and crash, too. Even if they survive the landing, mergansers, grebes and a few other waterbird species cannot take flight from dry land and would be fatally stranded. National Audubon estimates about 150,000 bird deaths a year from collisions with solar panels.

Site selection is the main form of mitigation: Locating solar farms away from migratory flyways and local breeding habitat. But widespread expansion to displace fossil-fuel plants would undoubtedly make it harder to find low-impact locations. Other ideas include contoured or pebbled glass surfaces on solar panels to disrupt the sky and lake effects. Of course, studies to find bird-friendly sites and research that could mean some retooling solar panel manufacturing would not be cheap.

To understand concentrated solar, think of children playing with a magnifying glass and a piece of paper. Kneeling on the sidewalk, holding glass at the right angle above paper, they discover that a pinpoint of sun sharply focused through the glass can set the paper on fire (or at least burn a spot in it). Now, imagine 175,000 mirrors the size of garage doors, concentrating solar rays together. A similar principle is at work in concentrated solar.

The one such functioning facility in the US is at Ivanpah, CA in the Mojave Desert. Five square miles of mirrors reflect and aim sunlight at three 40-story generating towers. The reflected rays heat steam boilers that turn generators to create electricity. Cherry Creek State Park in south metro Denver is about five square miles. Picture the park covered entirely with solar mirrors and three 400-foot towers.

Unfortunately, concentrated light attracts insects, which in turn attract birds. The disturbing result: Birds flying through the rays are incinerated. Workers at the Ivanpah plant call them "streamers," as the stricken birds trail wisps of smoke as they

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fall from the sky. About 6,000 birds a year die there; no viable way to prevent it has yet been devised. Fortunately, concentrated solar isn't very popular compared with solar panels.

Wind turbine power

One million bird deaths a year. That's the toll from collisions with wind turbines, according to various studies and statistical estimates. A number of factors are at play, all with potentially deadly consequences. Collisions are a greater danger to birds with eyes more to the sides of their heads, for instance, because of poor forward vision. Behavior, too, is an element: Raptors in flight, more focused on scanning below for prey, aren't as aware of obstacles directly ahead. The wind-driven blades of turbines in a utility-sized array rotate through huge amounts of air space, and birds passing through may not even recognize them as a threat.



A study at a wind farm in Norway discovered that painting one of the blades black on each turbine potentially can reduce fatal bird strikes by nearly two-thirds (62 percent), especially losses of the White-tailed Eagle, a large Eurasian raptor. Retrofitting existing wind farms with more efficient, new-generation technology could produce the same amount of electricity with fewer turbines. In another study, even a specific change for offshore windfarms — raising the bottom tip of turbine blades at least 130 feet above the water's surface — appears to reduce fatalities greatly because birds in the study areas tended to fly at lower levels over water.

In the light of all this information, what is it that each of us can do? First of all, there is energy efficiency. Remember that the cleanest, greenest energy is the energy you don't use.

Next, have a healthy skepticism when reading about green energy. Consider the source of the information, ask questions, and form your own judgement. And be aware that new studies are coming out every day.

DFO's conservation committee will continue to monitor this issue, so read your *Lark Bunting*. Better yet, join the conservation committee and help stay on top of the changing landscape of green energy. [Contact the conservation committee](https://dfobirds.org/) for more information. The link is on the conservation page of the website, <https://dfobirds.org/>.

Connecting with new technologies for bird conservation

Sharon Tinianow

Connection was the theme for the evening at DFO's October program featuring **Nathan Pieplow**, one of Colorado's foremost birders. Although only 25 people attended in person, with an additional 30 connecting via YouTube livestream, the program (which is now archived on the DFO website) connected all of us with the fascinating future of birding and bird conservation.

Pieplow's presentation, *The Internet of Wings*, began with a story from last spring about curlews. On the morning of April 14, 2021, a single Long-billed Curlew was reported in Boulder County. By noon that individual bird had been joined by another 143 curlews, obliterating the previous Boulder record of just seven in one day! What caused this convocation — a spring snowstorm that impeded the birds' migration north — was a fairly common seasonal migration anecdote. But in Pieplow's telling, there was much more to the story.

One of the birds carried a tracker placed on its back by **Andy Boyce**, a researcher with the American Prairie Reserve in Montana. He had received notification that the bird was in Wyoming presumably heading north from its winter habitat *before* it showed up in Boulder County. The tracking data showed Boyce's bird actually turned around and flew 300 miles out of its way to wait out the storm. Later on, there were fewer Long-billed Curlews at their usual breeding grounds in the grasslands of the Great Plains and Great Basin west and north of Colorado. Perhaps that spring snowstorm that demanded a 300-mile detour for the birds was a cause. Without the tracker and its associated technology, we would not have this information and our ideas about challenges facing this species would be less complete.

"We need to know more than even what is going on with our birds," he said. From the devastating report on the reduction in bird numbers since 1970 (a total net loss of 3 billion birds) to the reported scarcity of birds this past spring, we know that birds are in trouble. Pieplow went on to describe advances in tracking technology in more detail and outline how each of us can support the technology to enhance bird conservation efforts.

The fact that birds move — not just during migration but almost constantly — is a big challenge for researchers. Advances in tracking technology can help them piece together a more complete picture of where birds are going and where we should focus our conservation efforts. The tracking device on that Long-billed Curlew will only work on fairly large birds. It is essentially an on-board cell phone that gives the bird's exact location while it is within cell phone range. But the transmitter is far too heavy for a songbird.

The newest tags are teeny-tiny things that even a Monarch butterfly can carry. They send out pings at regular intervals that are received by [Motus](#), a series of wildlife tracking towers. Knowing where birds are going allows us to link populations, identify bottlenecks and develop conservation strategies based on data. Tracking birds in this way helps answer questions we didn't even know to ask.

The limiting factor is the number of towers. Pieplow shared a map that shows Motus tower locations across North America. There are many in the eastern United States and Canada, especially along the Atlantic coastline, but few in the West. Each tower costs between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and we need a lot more of them to create the kind of network that will provide sufficient data. Colorado-based [Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#) is building a collaboration of bird organizations to install more of these towers in the western US. (**Matt Webb** is the contact at BCR for more information.)

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Meanwhile, Pieplow said the [Terra Project](#) is another effort to watch. The details are still being developed, but for about \$180 per station, individual homeowners could outfit their yards with a microphone and radio receiver that would detect Motus-tagged birds and pick up nocturnal flight calls. Imagine if you could set your smartphone to let you know when a certain species is in your area!

Pieplow transitioned to another internet-based effort that uses the [Merlin bird ID app](#) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Many birders use this app both to ID birds in the field and to submit checklists to the Cornell Lab wherever they bird. The new sound ID recently added to Merlin provides an opportunity for birders to help improve the app.

Although Merlin's photo ID feature is about 90 percent accurate, the new sound ID feature, which uses artificial intelligence (AI), is much less precise. To make it better, humans need to submit more spectrograms of bird song to "train" the AI feature. For every species, it takes about 100 spectrograms to train the app to recognize the bird by sound.

Pieplow said volunteers can help in two ways. First, they can serve as annotators, listening to the submitted bird songs and IDing the species. Second, they can submit recordings from the field. He noted

that some very common birds have highly varied calls, often including regional dialects that make identification by song trickier still. If more birders contribute more to the Merlin sound ID effort, researchers are more able to connect breeding grounds with wintering grounds for bird species and develop appropriate conservation plans.

The new technologies Pieplow shared with us are amazing. The opportunities for birders to get involved in so many different ways, from donating time to donating money, are really exciting. If you missed this important program, you can view the recording on the [Past Programs page of the DFO website](#).



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

A View Forward from 2021

*Editor's note: **From the Field with David Suddjian** is an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at dsuddjian@gmail.com.*

David Suddjian

I didn't realize how much I missed DFO field trips until we finally were able to restart things last May. Many birders were eager to get back into the field on DFO outings, be out with our leaders, and have our core activity back after 14 months. It was a great relief to share field trips with birding friends again, and to make new friends, since many new folks joined the DFO birding community after the Covid interruption.

Thank goodness Denver Field Ornithologists was able to ramp back up so quickly after a complete stop. Can you believe that by the end of 2021 we will have had 111 field trips since May? Go DFO! That is an average of 14 field trips per month. And we got right back to offering opportunities to reach varied and new places, as well as trips to old favorites.

Our post-COVID trips have visited 34 Colorado counties to date. We've had a full array of trips throughout core Denver metro and Front Range areas, from Fort Collins to Pueblo. And we have birded far afield into the mountains, the far northwest, northeast, and southeast of the state. Our 2021 field trips were especially good for shorebird study, and for introducing birders to new places. I am personally aware of many amazing birding experiences on our 2021 trips, and I know that every *trip* had great moments.

DFO trips routinely fill up and last-minute shifting often opens a spot, so waitlists can be a positive experience in the end. Participants encounter an excellent web interface that makes it easy to register and find out trip details. Looking closely at our 69 field trips from August to November, I counted 139 different individual participants. That is maybe 20 percent of our

membership plus non-member participants. More than half of the participants went on two or more trips, and many are "frequent fliers."

The numerous trips offered by DFO over a season are serious learning opportunities for birders interested in actively advancing their skills and knowledge. And our trips create a DFO birding community of friends. This is especially appreciated after the isolation of the Covid-19 shutdown.

Our field trip program depends on a crew of dedicated, all-volunteer DFO certified leaders. We presently have 24 such leaders who are active and led at least one trip in 2021. An additional 13 leaders intend to resume leading trips in 2022. We certified four new leaders this fall and hope to add more in 2022 so we can expand field trip opportunities. Our field trip leaders serve because we love leading trips. But I encourage every field trip participant to thank the leaders for their efforts and recognize the many details that leaders must tend to so that you'll have a good trip experience. Thanks to participants and trip leaders both.

I am excited for our field trip program in 2022. Here are some key elements of the vision for field trips in the coming year:

Program momentum — DFO's trip listings will continue to grow, a program unmatched by any other club or volunteer organization in breadth, consistent quality, low price (free!), easy website interface, and creativity. We will balance our monthly offerings in various parts of our core area with outings both on weekdays and weekends, and even at varied times of the day.

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Creative new trip ideas — Look for additional offerings and themes. For example, DFO has not spent much time in southwestern Colorado, so watch for trips to many new places there. We will develop more excursions into neighboring states, too.

“Developing Birder” — This theme is not so much about special trips, but rather trips where we’ll pay special attention to advancing bird ID skills, watching bird behavior more closely, and learning seasonal and habitat contexts, all at a pace that maximizes learning. We also envision a series of short teaching videos that will become an ongoing resource for all birders.

County Birding — DFO will help trip-goers visit more new counties and birding locations throughout the year. If birding in more of our 64 Colorado counties interests you, expect to find great group opportunities with DFO. County birding is one of the best ways to increase core knowledge of what birds are found in what Colorado locations and at what times of the year.

In the end, DFO makes birding fun by helping our trip participants become better birders. I like this simple testimony from a recent participant on an October trip to Park County. She wrote:

As with many DFO trips, when I was back in the car headed home, I had that feeling of wanting to go birding again, as soon as possible.



Antero Reservoir
Darcy Juday



Taking (a tax) advantage of 2021

Roger Koester and Sue Summers

Doing good *and* helping your bottom line is easy in 2021.

In the coronavirus relief package signed into law last year, Congress gave us an easy way to support a charitable organization such as DFO and take a tax deduction for it. You may recall that in the 2020 CARES Act (short for Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act), Congress included a provision for \$300 “above-the-line” tax deductions. Above the line means taken straight out of gross income on the income tax Form 1040 for charitable gifts. That relief package not only continues for the current year but has been clarified by the IRS.

For 2021, individuals can claim a deduction from gross income of up to \$300 (up to \$600 if you file jointly) for a cash donation in 2021 to a qualifying charitable organization such as DFO. “Cash donations” include not only cash, but also checks as well as donations made using credit or debit cards. For 2020, the limit on deductions was \$300 whether you filed taxes individually or jointly, so the change for the 2021 tax year can give you up to double the benefit if you file your 2021 federal tax return jointly in 2022.

The personal benefit of these donations is that they will reduce your taxable income even if you don’t itemize your 2021 tax deductions when you file your federal return in 2022. That’s because in 2018, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act went into effect. While it nearly doubled the standard deduction,

it also made it more difficult for many people to qualify to itemize their tax deductions. Therefore, donations to charitable organizations became, for many people, a “feel-good” action without having an actual tax benefit. Now, you can both feel good and enjoy a tax break!

If you decide to donate to DFO, you can designate your gift in two ways: to the Research, Conservation and Education Grants fund that supports scientific and educational projects about birds and their habitat, or to the Friends of DFO fund, which supports the club’s annual operations. Either way, you can make your gift in memory of someone or to honor a living individual. Simply go to the “[Support DFO](#)” section on the main menu of the website (<https://dfobirds.org>) to get started.

As always, be sure to ask if your employer matches charitable gifts. This can greatly enhance the value of your gift, and provide even more benefit to DFO. Also, as we discussed in our previous article, don’t forget that in retirement, you can designate all or part of a required distribution from your IRA to go directly to DFO, which qualifies as a reduction to the taxable portion of that distribution. See that article in last month’s (November) issue of the newsletter in *The Lark Bunting* archive at: <https://dfobirds.org/News/LBArchives.aspx>.

As with all tax topics, be sure to consult your tax or investment adviser if you have any questions about these tax benefits.



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

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Check payable to DFO and send to:

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